

# GREET ONE ANOTHER

Romans 16:1-27

Key Verse: 16:16

**“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.”**

Today’s passage is Paul’s personal greetings to the Roman believers. Usually Paul’s greetings are short and general. But here in Romans, Paul’s greetings are very personal and specific, and addressed to many different people, covering 27 verses. He mentioned 29 people, including at least 9 women. It was a diverse group of Jews and Gentiles and spanned the social scale from slaves to government officials. Some of them seem to be close personal friends of Paul, and others he may not have met. Yet he valued them all equally, as precious co-workers because they were in Christ. Paul had a deep affection for them; it is the reflection of Christ’s heart. As we know, Paul was a great scholar, a fruitful evangelist, a church planter, and an able administrator. Most of all, he was a shepherd for God’s people, who gave his heart to caring for them one by one with Christ’s mindset. What the people of our time need most are shepherds. Where there are shepherds, people can experience Jesus’ grace and come to life. They can be healed, become healthy and strong, and grow in the image of Christ. May God help us to learn Paul’s shepherd’s heart from his final greetings.

**First, Paul greets the Roman believers (1-16).** Before greeting them, Paul commends to them Phoebe, whose name means “bright and radiant” (1). She was a servant of the church in Cenchreae, a port town located six miles from Corinth. She carried Paul’s letter to Rome. In those days, women were often ignored and despised. Paul was worried that Phoebe might be treated disrespectfully. So, he commended her, showing his great respect and trust in her as a servant of Christ. Paul called her **“our sister,”** and **“a deacon of the church.”** Furthermore, he asked them to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from them. It was because she had been a benefactor to many people, including Paul (2). Here

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“**benefactor**” means “patron,” that is one who gives financial assistance and hospitality. Such benefactors are integral to advance God’s kingdom.

In verses 3-16, the word “**greet**” appears seventeen times. This greeting is most often from Paul to an individual or small house church. Paul also encouraged them to “**greet one another with a holy kiss**” (16). A holy kiss was a sign of familial affection. Some scholars say that in the early church this “**holy kiss**” was part of the worship service. We are all God’s family members, purchased with the blood of Christ. We need to express our concern for each other whenever we meet. But it is so easy to be indifferent, because we are too busy to be concerned about others. It seems to be a small thing to greet each other. However, when someone is not greeted warmly, they may feel rejected and hurt, and become distant. So it is very important for us to greet each other warmly and with a big smile. Even though we don’t feel like smiling, for others’ benefit we should smile. When we do so, we can be happy, and the environment will become warm even during the winter. Let’s greet each other frequently and genuinely, taking enough time, so we may feel truly greeted by one another. Then our greeting can overflow, and we can send greeting cards to our brothers and sisters in small house churches and to missionaries around the world.

Now let’s consider who Paul greets and how. Verse 3 says, “**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.**” Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned frequently in the New Testament (Ac 18:2,18,19,26; 1Co 16:19; 2Ti 4:19). Sometimes they appear as “**Priscilla and Aquila,**” and other times as “**Aquila and Priscilla.**” They are always mentioned together. They were exemplary and influential to all the churches of the Gentiles. They originally went to Rome as immigrants. But when Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) ordered all the Jews to leave Rome, they moved to Corinth, where Paul was beginning his gospel ministry. As they were all tentmakers, they met at their workplace and became partners in business (Ac 18:1-3). In this way they became friends and lifelong gospel partners. They served in gospel ministry in Corinth, and then Priscilla and Aquila followed Paul to Ephesus, and wherever he went. Most likely, they went to Rome in response to Paul’s vision while in Ephesus (Ac 19:21). Paul says that they risked their lives for him (4). Perhaps this refers to a

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time when Paul was in danger in Ephesus (Ac 19:23-41). In any case, it shows the depth of their commitment to Paul and love for him. This came from their love for Christ. It is tempting for such influential people as them to serve God independently. But they were faithful to Paul's ministry to the end; it was for Christ's kingdom. In fact, they served with Paul as if serving Christ himself. So, Paul was very thankful to them.

Not only Paul, but all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them. Wherever they went, they opened their home to Christian brothers and sisters and had worship services there (5a). They served many churches wholeheartedly and sacrificially with the same love they had for Paul. They had pure motives to serve the Lord and advance his kingdom. They were truly a blessing. For example, they served a man named Apollos. He spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, but knew only the baptism of John, not of the Holy Spirit (Ac 18:25). After hearing his message, Priscilla and Aquila did not criticize him publicly. Rather, they invited him to their home for a delicious meal and then humbly explained the way of the Lord more adequately. Since then, Apollos became a fruitful Bible teacher (Ac 18:24-28). Priscilla and Aquila were wonderful disciple-makers in addition to being generous and sacrificial hosts for God's people. There is a temptation for such people to misuse their influence. But they served purely to build up God's ministry for the glory of God. That's why all the churches were grateful to them. May God raise many Christian couples like them among us.

Verse 5a says, **“Greet also the church that meets at their house.”** We easily associate churches with buildings. But a church is a group of believers. At that time believers gathered in their homes, called **“house churches.”** In modern society, we tend to emphasize big meetings with well-organized programs and the latest technology. It is easy to overlook the value of the house church. But the house church has distinct advantages over big churches. They are warm, open and personal. They involve the whole family in worshiping and serving the Lord. They can serve the Lord where big churches are not allowed. This requires family members to be Christ-centered and to sacrifice. It must be done wisely,

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balancing family life and ministry. Those who do so can grow in the knowledge of Jesus. Thank God for using house church ministry effectively in our times.

In verses 5b-15, Paul mentions 25 people by name, and refers to other small groups in house churches. When we observe these greetings carefully, we can learn something from Paul about serving in God's ministry. **First of all, Paul often says the words, "in the Lord," "in Christ," or "to Christ."**<sup>1</sup> In fact, these words are repeated eleven times (2,3,7,8,9,10,11,12[2],13,22). Paul's life principle was to live and die in the Lord, and to do everything in the Lord (Gal 2:20; Php 1:21). Just as a fish cannot live without being in water, so also a Christian must be in Christ. **"Christian"** means **"a person who is in Christ,"** one **"who belongs to Christ."** A Christian serves Christ as his Lord and lives for his glory. Christ becomes his meaning, joy, hope, purpose and everything. While a Christian is "in the Lord," an unbeliever is "outside the Lord." A Christian is set apart from the world. We should not think or act as we or the world want, but as Christ wants, for we are "in the Lord."

Also, this idea of **"in the Lord"** means that all people are equal **"in the Lord"** regardless of nationality, social status, education or wealth. On this basis, believers can have fellowship freely in the church and form a community of love. This was revolutionary. The Roman church consisted of Jews, Romans and Greeks. Also, there were men and women, free and slave, rich and poor, social elites and the lowly. **"In the Lord"** all barriers are torn down and they could be one. Paul saw them **"in the Lord."** That is why he valued them, respected them, and loved them dearly. These days in America, political polarization is serious. There is so much division, strife, hatred and violence. In this environment, some people lose their sanity and commit atrocious acts. That is why we hear of so many mass shootings and random acts of violence. Though we live in such a world, we Christians are **"in Christ."** In Christ we have love, joy and peace; protection, provision and power; truth, grace and mercy. So, we can be gracious, and respectful of each other. In Christ, we can form a warm, loving community that embraces the diversity of humanity and be a blessing in this broken world.

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<sup>1</sup> In verse 10, "fidelity to Christ" is translated "approved in Christ" in most other versions (NASB, KJV, NKJV, NRSV, ESV, NET).

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**Secondly, Paul valued coworkers highly.** The words “**my dear friend**” (5b,8,9,12b), and “**my fellow Jew(s)**” (7,11), and “**my co-worker(s)**” (3,9) are repeated eight times. Though Paul was an apostle with great spiritual authority, he was not condescending. Rather, he saw the Roman believers as his co-workers and friends. This reflects the love of Jesus, who called his disciples “**friends**” (Jn 15:14-15). Our relationships in Christ should not be limited to titles and positions, but always be moving in the direction of friendship. Furthermore, whenever Paul mentioned someone’s name, he commented on their specific good point. For example, he greets Epenetus as “**the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia**” (5b). Paul respected Epenetus as the first sign of God’s work in Asia. Andronicus and Junia had “**been in prison**” with Paul. He calls them “**outstanding among the apostles,**” and “**in Christ before I was**” (7). Some scholars say that they were a husband and wife, an itinerant missionary couple. Paul greeted Apelles, saying, “**whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test**” (10). Though Apelles had been tested by a trial, he remained faithful to Christ. When trials come, we can be tempted to avoid suffering by compromising our faith. But Apelles stood firm in his faith and Paul recognized him as a victor. Paul greeted Rufus as “**chosen in the Lord**” (13a). Rufus may very well be the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus’ cross (Mk 15:21). It seems that the entire family became Christians. Rufus might have felt it was a sorrowful fate when he was “caught” along with his father. Yet it was God’s gracious choosing. His mother became a mother to others, including Paul (13b).

**Thirdly, Paul recognized women’s hard work.** Paul mentioned at least nine women coworkers’ names. Included were, “**Mary, who worked very hard for you**” (6), “**Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord**” (12a), and “**Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord**” (12b). Greco-Roman society was strictly patriarchal. Women were not usually mentioned by their own name, but always in connection to their husband or family head. But here Paul mentions them by name, one by one. He appreciated their labor in the Lord. In our church, usually women work very hard behind the scenes without much recognition. Their husbands, children and Bible students often take their hard work for granted. But we should recognize

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and appreciate them. We are so thankful for all the great women of faith who work very hard behind the scenes.

In this part, we see the shepherd's heart of Paul. It is amazing to know that Paul had been a harsh and legalistic person. But after meeting Christ, he was changed into a loving shepherd for many kinds of people. As I meditated on this amazing grace, mysteriously, my own heart was transformed and renewed. I could experience Christ's shepherd's heart for someone I could not understand before. Now, this person looks so lovely, and I feel affection for them. Surely, the Lord wants us all to have his shepherd's heart.

**Second, a warning, final greetings and doxology (17-27).** We can divide these final verses of Romans into three parts: a warning (17-20), greetings from Paul's coworkers in Corinth (21-24), and a concluding doxology (25-27). In his other letters, after final greetings, Paul always finishes by blessing his hearers with the grace of Jesus. But in this letter, after long greetings, he gives a warning about division. This seems to be a general warning. Paul knew that in any church the problem of division can arise. It is because Satan is working behind the scenes. Satan's strategy is to divide the church and hinder the spread of the gospel message. That's why Paul said: **"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them"** (17). The church can be united as one when we believe the gospel and live by it. No matter the reason, if someone causes division and obstructs the gospel message, they are opposing God. We don't need to argue with them. But we should watch out for them and keep away from them, refusing to have fellowship with them. It is because they are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites (18a). They are skillful communicators and very clever; they know how to persuade naive people (18b). They stir up a rebellious spirit and destroy the unity of the body of Christ.

Paul realized that the Roman believers were obedient. Because of that, Paul rejoiced. It seemed that there was no serious problem at that time. But division could arise at any time. So, Paul wanted them to have spiritual

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discernment - being wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil (19). Each member is responsible to build up the body of Christ, practicing discernment, to protect it against division. We must all engage in the spiritual war against Satan. We can know that Satan will be completely defeated. Paul said, **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”** (20a). This reminds us of God’s promise to send a Savior who would crush Satan’s head in Genesis 3:15. Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise through his death and resurrection. Though Satan’s head is crushed, he still prowls around looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8). So we should always be alert, and trust in God’s final victory. As Satan is defeated, God gives us true peace.

Paul also blessed them by saying, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you”** (20b). Paul began this letter with the blessing of grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He ends his letter with blessings of peace and grace from God and our Lord Jesus. This is different from worldly peace and favor. It is not earned by our effort but given by the generosity of God and the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not temporary, but eternal. When we have this kind of peace and grace, we are truly happy and fully satisfied. We can live a gospel - centered life with great joy.

In verses 21-24, Paul’s coworkers in Corinth greet the Roman believers. They were Timothy, who was the co-worker of Paul; Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, who were his fellow Jews; Tertius, who was Paul’s stenographer; Gaius, who served Paul and the whole church with hospitality; Erastus, the city’s director of public works; and Quartus, their brother.

Paul concluded with a doxology: **“Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen”** (25-27). From the beginning to the end, Paul talked about the gospel. Here we learn that the revelation of the gospel is

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progressive. It was not fully revealed in a day but over a long time, and in various ways through the prophets. When the time had fully come, the mystery of the gospel was clearly revealed through Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies in the Old Testament. Without him, the Old Testament is partial, preparatory and fragmentary. But through Christ all the prophecies are fulfilled fully, decisively, finally and perfectly. God's purpose is for all nations to come to the obedience that comes from faith, become children of God, inherit eternal life and gain God's glorious kingdom. In his great wisdom, God's glory is revealed forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Let's remember Romans 1:17: **“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’”** (1:17). By faith in Christ we receive God's righteousness: we are justified by faith in Christ, being sanctified by faith in Christ, and will be fully glorified by faith in Christ. Let's hold to this faith, live by this faith, and share this faith with a world that so desperately needs it. And let's do so with the shepherd's heart of Christ, as Paul did.