

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript
Episode 56
Romans, Part 25 (Rom 16)
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Episode Summary:

In this final episode of the Romans series, Matt tackles a number of topics and addresses several important questions, such as: How does Romans 16 fit within the letter as a whole? Are there reasons for thinking it was not part of the original letter and, if so, how do these reasons hold up to critical scrutiny? Paul mentions a number of other people in this section, too, (Phoebe, for example) and their ministry work. What can we learn from this "greeting section"? Moreover, how does the reference to Satan being crushed under the feet of the Roman Christians shed light upon Paul's ecclesiology and christology? Listen to find out!

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Check out Matt's newest book, The End of the World As You Know It: <https://a.co/d/7fuglXx>

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Transcript:

0:00 Hey friends. Welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted. My name is Matt Halsted, and it's a pleasure to be with you once again this week. Well, today marks a sad, but exciting day here on the podcast because we're finishing up today our series through the Book of Romans. We'll be looking at chapter 16, the final chapter of this incredible letter. I hope you've enjoyed this series. We've been doing this series for a long time, so it's fun to finish up. It's always fun to complete our task. And hopefully you've gotten a lot out of this series - I know I have.

Every time I look into Romans, it seems like I learn something new, because there's always something to mine in this wonderful gold field. I mean, there's just so much gold here, and it's always fun to come back with fresh eyes. We made it a point to not only look at the surface of the text, but to get behind the text, right? And what I mean by that is every time Paul quotes from the Old Testament or alludes the Old Testament, we tried to pay attention to those things and then go back to the Old Testament and read the context of that original quotation or allusion. And I hope that's been beneficial. I encourage you, from here on out, to pay very close attention to the New Testament whenever it does

that. And you know, maybe it's beneficial to have a yellow or some bright colored highlighter, so that every time you read something in the New Testament that refers to the Old Testament, you can highlight it. And then you can go back and read up on those sections.

Because I think it's very beneficial for a number of reasons, one of which is in our time and maybe I'm just speaking out of an awareness of my own context, but growing up in in my context, it was as if the Bible was split in two. So you had the Old Testament on the left and the New Testament on the right, and the two shall never come close together, right? You had law and gospel. Law on the left, gospel on the right; legalism in the first part of the book, grace in the latter part of the book. And, you know, let me just say that that's just such a terrible dichotomy for a million reasons.

And this is why I'm passionate about intertextuality, like showing, in other words, how the text of the Bible interacts with itself. And that's why we've been paying very close attention to quotations and going back to the Old Testament. Because I think what ends up happening is a lot of Christians, as I said, think the Bible is just these two big parts and they really don't go together. And hopefully I've shown that they do - at least offered a glimpse into the ways in which they go together.

You know, we try to pay very close attention on the podcast to the meta-narrative of Scripture. You know, there's a story that is weaved throughout all the other stories of the Bible. And that story, that meta-story, is very important. And it can be detected. So there's some continuity between the old and the new; between, page one and the last page of Scripture. That's been the goal in the way I've approached Romans; is to tell the Christ story, the Jewish story; and looking at a lot having to do, of course, with the Abrahamic covenant. And so that's sort of been my motive, is I want to show how the Bible fits together. Because a lot of times, I think we Christians... we just have no clue how it does fit together. We think the Bible is just a collection of wholly different texts. Like what does Malachi have to do with Romans? If you asked the regular Christian, "What does Malachi have to do with Paul's letter to Rome; and are there any commonalities? Are there any features that bear semblance with one another?" I want I want people to be able to answer that. That's my passion. I want to show how the Bible fits together. I want to I want to help people read the Bible as a one story.

None of this is to suggest I should say, (and so let me put a footnote here; and it's a big important footnote); I'm not suggesting that we should flatten out the discontinuities that we see in Scriptures. So, I'm not suggesting that the different stories, the different books, or the covenants even; I'm not suggesting that there's not differences between them. There are, and I acknowledge that; but I suspect that what happens, (again maybe I'm speaking out of my own personal context here), but I suspect that what happens more is that we failed to see the continuities. So, I'm speaking in that framework, and from that perspective.

So, lots more to be said of course. This is not obviously, it goes without saying, this is not the final word that I have on Romans. We'll keep coming back to this book. Like I said earlier, every time I go to Romans and read through it, I learn something new. I noticed something fresh, and I think that's just the experience of what it means to be a human interpreter. You know, every time we come to Scripture, we're in a different position in

life, we're in perhaps a different season of life that has different questions that we need to ask of the text. And so the text can supply different answers because we're viewing it from a different perspective. Time is the great perspective changer. If I'm reading Romans at age 13, hopefully I'm reading it differently at age 40. And so that just goes without saying that different circumstances require that different questions be asked, and sometimes different circumstances require the scripture to pose different questions to ask that demand answering. If we're going through a season of life where we're struggling say to be faithful Christians, and in a certain area of life; then the scripture is going to pose direct questions to us that will require answers with respect to that particular situation that we are in. And so I think Romans works like that.

6:10 I think that's how hermeneutics works. I've spoken about that a lot. The dialogical aspect of hermeneutics, I think this is very, very, very, very, very important; and so this is, again, not the final word that we have on Romans. We will be coming back to it quite a bit, but all to say Romans is not the only word. There's so many different parts in Scripture that we need to explore. And so we've traveled these woods quite a bit these past several months and so it's time to look ahead and see different landscapes to explore there, too. And I really like that metaphor, I guess you could say; the idea of going through Scripture as a journey. I've often used that here on the podcast. You know I'll say we're journeying through Scripture, and I think that's such an important way of seeing the reading of Scripture. You know, I think if we approach scripture as masters - we're trying to master the text - I know what we mean by that, but I feel like we need to be careful to remember that we are finite learners, and we're constantly learning. So, you know we never want to close off the potential to learn more. So, that's why I like the journey metaphor - we're on a walk and there are new things to see. The horizon gets bigger, or we start seeing different perspective as we travel off into the horizon. And so I think it's a very important, a very healthy thing to do. And so, that's how I approach the reading of Scripture.

There's lots more to say about that, but let's just dive into Romans. We'll be looking at Romans chapter 16. We're tackling the whole chapter. We'll do it in three parts here on this episode. There are three nicely divided sections that we can look at, and so without further ado let's go. Let's go ahead and jump into Romans chapter 16.

8:20 Before I begin reading chapter 16 it's important to say a brief word about the integrity of the chapter itself. Now by integrity, what I'm referring to is how some scholars question whether or not Romans 16 belongs to the original letter that Paul sent to Rome. Now you might wonder, 'Okay... well, why do some scholars question whether or not chapter 16 was part of the original letter?'

And there's a few reasons for this. In the manuscript history, there are indications that there there's only fourteen chapters of Romans. So what happened to the last two in in the manuscript history and I should say in one strand of the manuscript history? That's one issue. And in his commentary, Doug Moo actually addresses this stuff and his position (I think he says it's his tentative position here), but he says that the best explanation for why the last two chapters were cut off has to do with something that Origen said; and namely that Marcion had cut off the last two chapters for his own theological reasons. And so that's a position that Moo says he holds too, in a tentative way. So, you have that issue, that textual manuscript is historical issue, and I think I like what Moo has to say

there. That seems plausible to me. And so that would explain why in one strand of the tradition you have only fourteen chapters.

- 9:54 The other thing that people point to is the content of chapter 16 itself. So, in chapter 16 as you'll see when we read it, Paul for starters has a whole list of people that he names. There's a long list of people that he wants to greet. And some scholars point to how, well that's really interesting because Paul's never been to this church, so what explains his knowledge of these people? And so I think many scholars question this. It seems out of place; this doesn't seem like it fits naturally within what we've read so far.

You also have this brief section in the middle of Romans 16 where Paul all of a sudden starts warning against false teachers. It's kind of just tossed in there and you're kind of left wondering - well that's kind of out of the blue. What's going on here? And so this is led to some speculation about the integrity of Romans 16 - you know, like maybe this was appended to the text of the letter. And at a later point, maybe perhaps by Paul himself later, or whatever. Who knows, you know? And so that's what's going on here.

So the way that Moo answers this. And I find Moo's arguments very compelling and by the way this is comes from his Romans commentary, which is a fabulous resource to have if you need a good Romans commentary.

So basically just to recap he says that the fourteenth chapter hypothesis probably is Marcian's doing. So, that just the idea of a fourteenth chapter thing, that's a later invention so there's no reason to accept the fourteenth chapter format of Romans because it's not original; that's due to Marcion. And some say, well maybe it was just a fifteen chapter book and the last chapter 16 was added later. And Moo, as I recall, I need to probably go back and reread some of this, but Moo as I recall says that doesn't make a lot of sense because in the manuscript tradition there is no manuscript that only has fifteen chapters. And so that seems a little weird; and besides that, he has some explanations for why the content of chapter 16 actually does fit okay.

For example Moo doesn't think it's a problem that Romans 16 starts talking about false teachers just given what Paul has been talking about in the book itself in Romans. So, he's been outlying the gospel. He's talking about highly controversial things like circumcision and all the things that... dietary restrictions and things like that, and we do know that these were points of contention in the early church. So that would make sense why Paul in Romans 16 would end his letter by saying, "Hey, watch out for the false teachers." And to me that's a that's a good explanation.

For me, when I read 16, I'm not thrown it back by his all of a sudden warning of false teachers. I think it actually kind of makes sense for the reasons I've said there. Paul talks about some highly charged issues if you know anything about the early church. I mean, go read Galatians, go read the Book of Acts. And there's definitely points of contention over dietary restrictions, circumcision, things like that.

And by the way just a little footnote here, if you want a little bit more historical perspective on those issues, go read 1 Maccabees, which is part of the Apocryphal, or the Deuterocanonical texts. I highly recommend that from a researchers perspective to go

and check those out, because it offers some important historical backdrop for why these issues were so important in the early church.

And the other thing here too is the greetings. So Paul lists a whole bunch of names. You might wonder how does he know these people when in fact he's never been to the church here. And that's actually a pretty good question. One obvious response would be, he did know that, or knew of them in some fashion. And some scholars have speculated that perhaps part of the way Paul knew these people is, again knowing a little bit about the history of the situation of Jews living in Rome. In A. D. 49, Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from the city of Rome. And so they had to leave. So kind of a little exile in sense. And of course during that period, Christians and Jews were one group essentially. So Christians were known as a Jewish sect, right? And so Christians would have been exiled there as well, at least the Jewish ones. And the Gentile ones could stay. But when they were expelled, they were sent outside of the city, outside the Empire. And so that creates opportunities for interaction with Christians outside of Rome.

So there's lots of options here with respect to that. And for me, personally, just saying briefly, we don't have to get into all this in depth, but I don't personally find any of the objections that some scholars give for why Roman 16 or 15 should be included within the original letter. I don't find them compelling, to be honest with you. I don't see how it's that decisive at all. So for me, I accept all 16 chapters as original. I don't think the internal content of Romans 16 pushes back against that thesis. I think it's totally fine. So anyway, that's a little bit of background. You can read up more on that. Lots of resources. You can probably look at any commentary, and I'll talk about these discussions as well.

15:53 Well, with that said, let's just start reading Roman 16. What I'm going to do is I'm going to divide Roman 16 up into three sections, and then I'll read one section, and then make comments on that. Lots of cool stuff here. So I'm going to begin reading vv 1-16.

Romans 16:1–16 (NRSV): 16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, 2 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.

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, 4 and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. 11 Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. 12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. 14 Greet

Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

17:47 Let's begin by chatting about Phoebe. Now, Phoebe is a very important person in this letter and for this letter, as we'll see in just a moment. She here, according to Paul in the first couple of verses, is a Deacon of the church at Cenchreae. He calls her a sister in the Lord and He's asking that the church in Rome would welcome her as 'is fitting for the saints,' he says; and to help her out with respect to her ministry, things that she's got going on. And he says that she is a benefactor of himself and for many other people. So, who is Phoebe? What is she doing and why is she important?

Well, here a lot of scholars are going to say, and I agree with them, that she is perhaps the letter carrier for Paul for taking his letter to the churches at Rome. You have to understand, this goes without saying, but in the ancient world you didn't have the post office. You couldn't just lick a stamp stick it on the envelope and send it off. These were very expensive endeavors. It cost a lot of money to get a message across the Empire.

Okay, so it cost me you know a whopping like 60 something cents to send a letter...I was at the post office the other day and I'm like, 'my goodness, it's like gone up.' And here I am complaining for something that cost less than \$0.70 even though since I think January it's gone up a little bit for a stamp. Anyway, I remember telling my wife, I was like, 'hey did you know that stamps went up?' And I was a little bit peeved because I had to pull out a couple extra pennies.

Well, in the ancient world, it was much more costly because you needed to yourself, or someone you knew, to travel on your behalf to take the letter. So, if you could go I mean you could take the letter yourself, but that would be kind of weird, right, because then why write a letter in that case? I mean, maybe there's reasons to, but you could just go yourself and preach the message that you wanted to preach instead of writing a letter and carrying it yourself. But, if you couldn't go for whatever reason, you might give a letter to someone who is already going or who has the means to go; who has the wealth to go because these things were very expensive. Again, it was more than just licking a stamp. You had to have enough money for food and travel and in some of these cases you know traveling across the Empire was dangerous. In fact, you could get robbed and those sorts of things. Fortunately, Rome had a pretty a pretty good traveling system. They had the Roman Road, for example. So, that actually did help a little bit, but still it doesn't completely mitigate against robbery and things like that.

20:32 So, Phoebe, from my perspective and a number of other scholars, seems to be a person of means. I don't suspect she was traveling alone. I suspect that she could she could finance other people to go with her. She clearly is a person, to me, of means simply because of the way Paul describes her as a benefactor. There's a lot of debate among scholars about what exactly that word means in this context. But to me it seems like exactly what it sounds like. I think she had some financial means and backing to support her ministry as well as to support the ministries of other people. Paul says that she was a benefactor to him. But not only to him, but to others as well. And he commends her for that.

So the idea is that she is the letter carrier. He's commending her to the churches at Rome and she's taking this off to them. That's sort of the assumption and I think it's a well-founded one, again, given what we know about letter carriers. And this is still a point of scholarly debate. There's lots of little things with respect to letter carrying. There's been quite a bit of work done on this, so it might be something of interest to you if you want to go back and look at some of the research that's done on this letter carrying in the ancient world. This is very important for New Testament studies, obviously. You can travel down that rabbit hole if you want to - it's pretty interesting. There's lots of debate and discussion about what all this entails. Many scholars with respect to this question are going to actually say Phoebe, as the letter carrier, is the bridge between Paul the writer and Rome, the recipient.

And why is that important? Well it's very important because she's in a position to communicate the meaning of the message. If there is question about what Paul is meaning about say Roman 9, or something. Many scholars have referred to Phoebe as that middle ground between these two. And let me explain this. So as we all know, Paul can say things that are rather difficult to understand and he can say things that that leave us scratching our head...okay, what does he mean about that? Well, wouldn't it be cool if we had access to the person who was with him at one point at least, to take the letter. I mean you could imagine a situation where Paul says, 'okay, Phoebe listen, Romans 9 through 11 is going to be kind of confusing to the readers. So when they ask this question, I didn't have a lot of papyri, a lot of space to say everything. So I abbreviated much of this. So if they ask about Romans 9, be sure to explain to them A, B and C means this over here.' And Phoebe says, 'okay, yeah I got that.' So, she makes mental notes about these sorts of things.

And we know that Paul did have a reputation for saying things that were difficult to understand. And we know this from, for example, Peter admits that some things that Paul writes are difficult to understand. And so Paul probably has this reputation...no not probably, he did have this reputation for being a sophisticated writer; and so it's not without warrant to suggest that he might have mentioned to Phoebe a few things of explanation. And it's not without reason to suggest that maybe Phoebe also knew of Paul's writing well enough to ask him, 'Hey, Paul remember how you're kind of confusing at times... would you mind explaining this to me so that when they this ask question I'll know how to answer them what you meant.' And it's also not without warrant to think that when Phoebe actually arrives in Rome, that people are going to be scratching their heads, just as we do in the twenty-first century. And they're going to be saying, 'Oh my goodness, what did he say in Romans 9? Phoebe tell me what did he mean by that word? What did he mean by that phrase?' And Phoebe would say, 'Yeah, I heard him talk about this one time, and here's what I think he meant.' Or. 'Oh yeah, he anticipated you not quite understanding because it is kind of confusing. So here's what he told me to tell you.'

So do we know that this actually happened? Of course not. We don't know. So we can't say for certainty, but can we say with some level of confidence that something like that happened. Well, I think we can say with the level of confidence, a decent high level of confidence even, that something like this did happen. I mean, we forget that these people who wrote the text of scripture were people. They weren't robots, and the people that carried these letters to the recipients they weren't robots either. They were like you,

people like me, who are not afraid to ask questions. And so these were living relationships. And so there's no doubt in my mind that things like this happened. So it's a reasonable hypothesis, I think. Well, I mean, I think in fact that someone who wants to believe the opposite would actually bear the burden of proof. You know what I mean? So I think I think this is all very reasonable.

25:33 Now, if that's the case, here's something really interesting to consider which, you know, we've said that there's a high level of confidence to think that was the case. And if so, then that would mean that Phoebe was the very first, you might say, commentator of the Book of Romans, which is pretty cool when you think about it, right? I own, you know, commentaries on Romans. I love Romans. You own some commentaries on Romans, I'm sure too. Like, there's a lot of commentaries on Romans out there that are really, really good. And some of them probably are not that good. But there's just a lot out there. How cool would it be to have access to the very first commentator on the Book of Romans? I think that'd be really cool. And so as it turns out, the Roman readers, the church at Rome, they did have access, or many of them had access to the very first commentator, namely Pheobe. So that's pretty cool. Something to consider.

And in a moment, I'm actually going to read a section from Richard Longenecker's really cool Romans commentary. It was published by the New International Greek Testament Commentary Series. So that's pretty cool. It's a great resource to have. I'll read a quote from that in a minute, but let me say a couple more things about Pheobe.

She's not only it seems to be the letter carrier, but she's clearly defined as a Deacon of the church at Cenchreae. Now, there's a lot of debate about this too, among the church and within the church, the modern day church. A lot of churches for example, don't have female deacons. Some churches do have female deacons. And so this is, of course, the point of controversy, debate. Hopefully we can just make it a point of discussion. The thing is, you know, when it comes to debates, they do have their place. And I think a good debate that's respectful, that's kind, that is actually seeking the truth; I think those are really good to have. All too often, though, when it comes to debates, it's not so much about a fact finding session as it is a session for making your opponent look dumb, or something like that. And you know, we all have our favorite things to believe in and our favorite doctrines, I guess you could say. And we all want to argue our position. Again, there's a place for that one hundred percent. I'm not denying that. But I think that needs to be within the context of pursuing truth. Like we all should be on either side of these debates in pursuit of the truth, such that we're willing to give up our position, if indeed our position is shown to be wrong. And so when it comes to these sorts of things just through experience and not practicing debate very well myself, (if I could be honest), I've just learned that let's just link arms and try to figure the truth out. And I'm not going to be offended. Um... if you know, there's some part of my theology that I need to adjust or change or whatever, I want to have a heart of submission to the Lord. So anyway, let's say all that. You know all this. I'm just saying all this because I think it's a good context for how to have these sorts of discussions.

Now here, Phoebe is called a deacon. Now, one thing that we might say is that, the word here could just mean minister. That she is just a servant of the church. That's what you can say - and we're all servants of the church. Every Christian is a servant because our Lord Jesus was a servant. Philippians 2:5-11; we've talked about that passage before,

where Jesus is called a servant and all the Church of Philippi were called to be servant minded. And so Jesus tells us in the gospel to be servant minded. So every Christian is a servant. Now, the issue comes in New Testament later where there's actually, it seems, an office, an actual position within the church that they call Deacon. And I think that's legitimate. I don't have a problem with saying that there's an actual office to designate certain people as deacons, official servants of the church to help out other members of the clergy and to carry out the ministry. I totally believe in that, and I subscribe to that. I subscribe to both, actually. We're all servants and yet there's also been office within the church that functions as a Deacon.

30:06 So the question is, who is Phoebe? Where does she fall in into either one of those categories? I think it's safe to say that she definitely falls in the first category. Because she's a Christian, it follows therefore that she is a servant. And since she's definitely that. The question is she an official servant of the church? Is she an official designated deacon? Did the church ordain her to this task or something like that? And this is where the contention flares up, and there's a many different views on the topic. So here's what ends up happening in these sorts of debates is that, as I said earlier, you typically will find the evidence that you need to support your position. So if you're a Calvinist, Romans 9 is your territory you can find all the stuff that you need to support your position. If you're an Armenian you can find all the things that you need to support your position as well. And so it just becomes a thing where my Bible verse can beat up your Bible verse. Like, 'You've got this verse, oh yeah fine. I've got my verse over here.' And I think that's probably a misguided way of understanding Scripture and how to use Scripture. As I said, earlier we should talk about the narrative of Scripture, the story of Scripture. I think you know we should understand these texts in light of the greater story.

Though what's interesting here and as some scholars have pointed out, is that this idea of a deacon here it's it seems to be qualified. Paul says she's a Deacon of the church at Cenchreae. Now the question is, does this hint at an official position because he names the actual Church of which she is servant. So it's not that she's just one might say, that she is not just a servant of Christ as a Christian in a general sense; but she she's a servant of a particular local church. There's a local expression of her servanthood that she spends her time doing. So yeah, what do you want to do with that? So again lots of debate. And these are just some of those issues. I suspect that this is a passage where no matter your position, you can find what you need to support your position. And just in interest of full disclosure, in my church we have female deacons. That's not a big deal at all for our church. And actually, we have a female deacon. We only have one deacon at the moment. We have more than one deacon, but we have one female deacon. And, I have zero problem with it. I don't have a problem with it at all. And so that's where I'm at; that's my position. It's always good because people might think, 'Well where does Matt stand on this question?' So that's where I'm at. So I'm totally fine with and have no issue.

So, she seems to be a person of means. I think that's an important thing to take away. Okay, so let me turn to Longenecker's commentary. There's a quote here. It's rather lengthy, but it's helpful. It just, it gives you a sense of where he's coming from in his perspective here. So I definitely want to read that.

And, you know, I need to say one more thing about the deacon thing before we dive into this. There's even some debate among the...So, in some traditions, you have some

people who don't believe that a woman can be an ordained deacon as part of the threefold order of ministries. So by threefold ministry order, I'm referring to the practices of, say, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican, and so forth, where you have Bishop, Priest and Deacon. So you see that threefold distinction appear in Ignatius' letters. If you haven't had a chance, by the way, to read Ignatius' letters, you should check that out because he talks about threefold order ministry.

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35:42 And so you have some who say, 'You have a. you have an official Deacon position, but that's part of a threefold order of ministry; and you know, only men can be part of that threefold ministry as a Bishop, a priest in Deacon.' But these some of these same people, you know, will also say, but there is also another role; we can have as a deaconess. That's not like an ordained, liturgical position. But it is still a position for women such as maybe Phoebe was. So anyway, I'm just mentioning that because it demonstrates that there are a plurality of views here. It's not just yes, she's a deacon or no, she's a deacon. There's actually within some traditions, this idea that there's another option. There's a deaconess option. It's not like an actual deacon that you would see in some other parts of New Testament. But it's like an actual different non-liturgical functioning deaconess office.

So you did have in church history women servants of the church because they would help women who were coming into the church for baptism. They would help them for modesty reasons. They would help them in the baptismal process because it would be inappropriate for a male to help a woman in the baptismal process. And so we had a

women set aside to do that sort of thing. So anyway, yeah, just outlining that position. So that's an option that what we see in some traditions... lots more to be said about this.

I think again, we always want to address these questions of the spirit of love, kindness and truth. You know, it's okay to stand up for your position. But to do so in a spirit of love.

Okay, let me read this from Longenecker. This is from his is from his Romans commentary. I'm reading from page 1064. And I think I'll read a little bit from 1065. So it's a big commentary. Here we go. He says,

“With respect to what part Phoebe had in delivering Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome, It seems evident that she carried the apostles letter from Corinth to Rome. Doing so at her own expense. As for what part she played in presenting and interpreting the contents of that letter to the Christians at Rome, it may legitimately be surmised that not only did she present Paul's letter to the Christian leaders and congregations at Rome, but she also served as their major source of information regarding: 1.) the apostles earlier use of the materials that he set out in the letter, and 2.) his intentions for the use of such materials. For after all, Phoebe had been Paul's patron during his ministry at Corinth, had most likely heard from his own lips the contents of the letter as it was being formulated, and must have had some part in discussing with Paul and other Christians of that area. At least a few portions of the letter, and therefore would have been in a position to explain to the Christians at Rome, 1.) what Paul was saying in the various sections of his letter, 2.) what he meant by what he proclaimed in each of those sections, and 3.) how he expected certain important sections of his letter to be worked out in practice in the particular situations at Rome.

Probably Phoebe should be viewed as the first commentator to others on Paul's letter to Rome. And without a doubt, every commentator, teacher or preacher on Romans would profit immensely from a transcript of Phoebe's explanations of what Paul wrote in this letter before actually having to write or speak on it themselves.”

So yeah, again from that section was from Longenecker, Romans Commentary pages 1064, 1065. I think what he's written there makes sense. I don't really have a problem with what he said there. We can't know for certain what all happened, but we can with reasonable, educated guesses surmise something like that, just as he had said. So I think that's enough chat about Phoebe... lots more to be said of course but that gets our wheel spinning a little bit.

40:02 Let's turn a little bit back to Prisca and Aquila. So here in verse 3 he says, ***Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house.*** So you know these people. This is Priscilla and Aquila Prisca is sort of a different way of saying Priscilla it's a different form of the name. So these are those same people, this couple who was very important in the early church. What's really interesting here as some commentators have pointed out is that Prisca is named first here. And so why is she named first? Some surmise again through educated guessing, but it's an educated guess. It's not exactly something that's just pure speculation, but she is probably mentioned first because maybe she is considered within that culture more prominent. I say due to her family, to her wealth or something like that.

If I'm not mistaken, I think Longenecker actually says that maybe Aquila was actually a freed slave. Maybe that's why he was mentioned last. Or some reason may be due to her prominence that she's mentioned first. It is odd. I mean you know again we're getting into that territory where it's like we don't know, but it is pretty significant that she's mentioned first. I think that needs to bear a little, at least a little bit, of weight.

Now we know from Paul that he doesn't consider one sex above the other. Like, Galatians 3, he doesn't seem to set gender apart in terms of males are better because they're males, or females are better because they're females. So yeah we don't have any of that going on here. I don't think that's why Paul names her first. Maybe she's just more well known because of her situation or something to that effect. Maybe it's just I don't you know...who knows, we can only speculate. The thing that I want to point out here though is that what does he say is, 'greet also the church in their house.' So this is really interesting because they do seem to have means to host a church. And what that means is they don't have just a little small building to meet in. They probably have something large enough to have a dozen, two dozen or who knows, more maybe, in their particular house church. And so I think that gives us some clue into their financial stability, their financial means and what not.

Paul thinks obviously very highly of them. This is a couple who shares a ministry trade with him. They seem to have means perhaps from that. So that's really interesting. Again, it's important to pay attention to some of these greetings, right, because they do give us some insight into the ministry life back then, as well as partnerships and things of that sort.

So yeah, you've also got Andronicus in verse 7. You have Andronicus and Junia who he calls 'my relatives who are in prison with me. They are prominent among the apostles.' Now this is another passage that is a very heated one. You know, given and there's a lot of issues here with respect to the Greek construction. Junia, who is she? The debate is, is she an actual apostle? Is she given that title? Or is she just well-known among all the apostles of whom she is not one, but she's well known among them? And so this has stirred up a lot of debate among scholars. There's lots of different options. Is she an actual apostle in some sense? Is she an apostle or she's like an apostle in a sense of having been someone who is sent to do ministry tasks and whatnot? I think it's clear from here that Junia and Andronicus are very important ministry partners. They are hard-working ministry partners and they are clearly sent from the Lord to do these sorts of things in Paul's mind. I think that's something that we can't miss. I think we need to let have its way that these are sent ones. These are people who are definitely apostles in that sense. Again, we can find the evidence that we want to support our positions at least at the very least we need to say that they are doing the work of ministry and it's appropriate to give them titles with respect to the ministry that they're doing. Are they Apostles in the sense that you know Peter is one? I don't think so. I think that the weight of it here is that they are doing the work of sent ones, people who have been sent based on their calling to do the work.

What's really interesting here if I could just stop and maybe make it off the cuff remark. It's really interesting to me how Christians can get so caught up in the ways of the world with respect to titles. At the end of the day friends, we should just be dedicated to the work of the Lord without any regard if we're going to you know have a title in that sense.

Now I want to balance that off too, because I want hard working Christians to get the recognition they deserve. And I want to work myself to make sure that no Christian is actually demeaned. I think that's not an option for us. I'm not suggesting that. I'm not suggesting that we should just forget about this topic. No. But I am suggesting though that if someone's doing the work, then that needs to be recognized. Because that's the most important thing here. And when we start debating about the titles, typically that gets us off the work that we're doing. And you know the truth is, there's a lot of people out there in the church, all across the world who do not have the titles that perhaps they deserve. But to them they're just so focused on the work that they don't care about some of that stuff as much as other people do. So my encouragement is to say: do the work of the Lord and keep fulfilling your calling. And as you do that, just know that your work is recognized by the Lord even if sadly it's not always recognized by your brothers and sisters in Christ. But just know that we are all on this journey together, and we are influencing, and we are impacting the lives of other people. Because we're saying we're committing ourselves to the Lord. And people see that. People see us work so hard for the Lord in fulfilling our ministry and that's going to inspire them to do that. But there are those people who are so intent on being given that title. Like it's almost a lustful thing and that honestly, that's a stifling sort of attitude to have. And it's just so antithetical to the ways of God, the ways of Jesus; who was Jesus King, and he takes up a basin and a towel. So anyway, I don't know. I'm just kind of rambling at this point, but hopefully that resonates a little bit and helps folks out. Yeah lots more to say, but I think we'll just leave it at that.

Okay, so that's the first part. I'm going to run through the second parts pretty quickly because I'm looking at the time and I want to make sure that we wrap this up in a decent amount of time. So verses 1-16 captures that first section of personal greetings. To me going back to what I said at the beginning. None of this seems to mitigate to push against the idea that this is actually what Paul intended to write to the Romans. I think it reads fine. I think there are many reasons why he would have known these Christians already because again many of them perhaps were pushed out of Rome with the Emperor Claudius's edict, that Jews had to leave the city; and so maybe Paul got to know them through those means. But anyway - very important passage here. I encourage you go back and read it and underline all the stuff the stuff that sticks out to you.

Okay let's move on to the second section.

48:38 The second section starts in verse 17 and stops at 24 and there's a few things here that I think are very interesting that we need to give our attention to. He begins by warning against false teachers. So he says

Romans 16:17–23 (NRSV): 17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. 18 For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. 19 For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil. 20 The

God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

21 Timothy, my co-worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.

22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

A number of things there stick out. First is of course the warning passage here which has for some scholars kind of troubled them with respect to the integrity of chapter 16. Why would Paul all of a sudden warn the church here of false teachers? It seems out of place, but in fact it's not. This doesn't bother me with respect to that integrity question. I think it actually makes perfect sense and it's something that you would expect at the end of the letter. So Paul has been so busy in the previous chapters talking about what it means to be justified before God, by faith. And he gives us the Abrahamic Covenant. He retells the story of Adam and as I've argued before, he retells the story of the Exodus in Romans 6-8. So he's bringing in a lot of thick theological discussion. You have the story of Israel in 9 – 11, and then you have a lot of very important 'how to live with each other' kind of content in chapters 12 – 15. So he's really dug deep into the soil here and he wants people to really get that stuff down. He doesn't think that there's much room at all to waver on these questions. And in his mind, there's definitely no room to wiggle into compromise with respect to how we treat one another, Jews and Gentiles. And so it would make sense to me why he would warn against false teachers.

51:00 In this era, there was a lot of discussion and debate, a lot of dissension that was sowed with respect to the question of circumcision, with respect to the question of justification or righteousness, with respect to dietary laws. All the things that Paul has discussed; we know for a fact that these were points of dissension. That sometimes false brothers would come into the church and they would say, hey you Gentiles you must do A, B, and C before you can be fully accepted into the Covenant family of God. Paul has no patience for that sort of thing because he wants everybody to be accepted into the covenant by faith alone in Jesus. That Jesus, and union with Jesus, is the deciding factor. And so we know that those debates happened. Again, read Galatians. Again, read Acts chapter... or just read Acts all throughout. There's some issues that are brought to the surface. And so I think it's appropriate for Paul to end on this. He says basically, 'guys listen, I've told you a lot of important things, none of which you should compromise. Watch out for those who would want you to compromise.' Watch out for those and he specifically mentions those who caused dissension and offenses. So watch out for those. 'Stay true to the teaching that I've given you. Just avoid those sorts of people. They don't serve Jesus, they serve themselves.'

And so this fits so well, I think, with respect to the whole letter. He does end verse 20 with a really interesting phrase. He says, "***the god of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet.***" What do you think that's a reference to? Think again of the Old Testament. Paul is a dedicated reader of those Old Testament stories. And he brings those into his own discussions. And I think this is a reference back to the Genesis story of the serpent being crushed at the feet of the seed of the woman. And you know that story quite well in Genesis, I'm sure. 'The God of peace will surely crush Satan under your feet.'

So a couple things I want to say here. If that's a correct connection that I've made back to Genesis, and we might christologically read that as a reference to Jesus. You know, Jesus is the serpent crusher. This really brings on a lot of images when you get to Revelation. So you have this dragon or this big serpent who is defeated by the lamb and throughout the early Christian era, I think these themes were very common in being discussed. But what's interesting here is that Paul actually says that the serpent will be crushed under *their* feet. Now okay which is it? Is he crushed under Jesus' feet or a Christian's feet? And I think what's interesting here is that you see Paul's understanding of what it means to be united to Christ. I think from a canonical perspective we can say that yes, definitely Paul thought of the serpent crusher as Jesus the Messiah. But he also understood the church, the body of believers, you me, Phoebe, Andronicus, all of us, right that we are united to Christ through our baptism. So he says that in in Romans chapter 6, baptism is that moment where we expressed unity in the resurrection, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And so and so by virtue of our having been united to Jesus, we are as a result of that united to his victory. Isn't that beautiful?

54:46 So you know it really heightens the sense of our Christian vocation that because we're part of Jesus, we are part of reversing the curse that the serpent brought up on humanity. Now we cannot do this in our own strength. Please don't hear me say that. It's only through our union with Christ the crucified and resurrected Christ. This is not a call to power. This is not a call to domination. I'm not suggesting that. But in fact it's a call to servanthood. It's a call to be like we're called to be – servants. Every time we pull up a towel and a basin of water and we wash the feet of our friends, what we're really doing is reversing the curse. The curse of which has called us to dominate our brother and sister. But actually we reversed that curse by becoming servants over brothers and sisters, by becoming servants of people. And that's what it means to live a cruciform life. That's a way of showing our union with the crucified Christ. And if we are crucified with him, Paul says we have the promise of being resurrected with him. And it's through our union with Christ that we crushed the serpent. It's just a beautiful thing. Again not by our own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ to the glory of God the Father. This is how it works.

It's just this is an example here in verse 20 how one little passage can reveal so much about Paul's theology of union with Christ. I think it's a very beautiful thing. It's worth exploring. Definitely worth praying about and considering. He says that's the God of peace will certainly crush Satan under your feet. I'd say this very important point is that again, it's not our strength but it's God who does it. He will crush it under our feet. That's a beautiful image as well. It's the God of peace who does this. And so I think what Paul is saying is that, look guys, we're often in a in a mess, we're often at dissensions with one another. But peace is coming and that peace will be a reality in in the church. Super cool stuff.

Let's jump to verse 22. He says, *I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.* What?! I thought Paul wrote this letter. So this is an example of how letter writing was a multi layered sort of phenomenon, I guess you could say. We've already said that Paul sent the letter through Phoebe. So Phoebe's sort of this intermediary. So she represents one layer of the story of the letter of Romans. We also get another layer with Tertius. So Tertius seems to be the one who is writing down the words that Paul is

dictating and right at the end of the letter he inserts this parenthetical which is pretty cool. He says, hey by the way, I Tertias, I want to say hi to you guys. Hope you're doing well. You know, he just kind of put that in there and it kind of goes on. So it's pretty cool.

So yeah, this is a cool Sunday school question you can ask your small group. You can say, hey guys who wrote the book of Romans? And then when all the hands raise and when all the voices say it was the apostle Paul, you can say, "Nope according to the apostle Paul's own letter, it was Tertius who wrote the letter." Anyway pretty cool stuff. Yet another example of the multilayered reality of letter writing in the ancient world. Super neat.

Alright let's turn to the final section the doxology which occurs in verses 25 - 27.

58:10 The letter ends with these words

Romans 16:25–27 (NRSV): 25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

OK, so this is a pretty cool passage here. It does a couple of things. One, very beautifully, it sums up Paul's entire vocation, namely to give God all the glory. And it's a very fitting way to end the letter. Now one thing we might remember here is that it's customary it seems, for Paul (as some commentators have said), Paul ends very important passages and points of discussion with a doxology, sometimes. And here he ends it as an important section, but also the entire book with the doxology. Doxology, of course just means words of glory. A *doxa* in ancient Greek meant opinion; to have an opinion. It came to mean in the New Testament typically means like glory. And then *ology* comes from *logos*, which means a word, or something like that. So it's a word of glory.

You might sing the doxology in church: "Praise God through him all blessings flow" that beautiful refrain. You do it at the end because we mark the end of our services, or we mark the end of our letters or writings with a word of praise to God because it reminds us why we do what we do. We do everything to the glory of God.

The other thing to take note here, it's really cool about this doxology is it kind of book ends the entire letter itself. So he mentions for example in this doxology he says, '**Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.**' That idea of strengthening, you might remember maybe, from a long time ago in Romans chapter one versus 11 and 12 Paul says the same thing. That's his motive for wanting to come to the church there. He says I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

So he starts off the letter by saying, hey, I want to encourage you, I want you to be strengthened; I want us to be both to be strengthened by each other's faith. And here he's

saying the gospel is the source of our strength; yours and mine. So in that way the doxology mirrors or bookends the letter. It ends the way it began.

1:00:57 You also see this idea of the revelation of the mystery. This reminds us of the discussion of Ephesians about the mystery of the gospel. So this is a par for the course for how Paul seems to be thinking about the gospel. The mystery related of course to the inclusion of the Gentile, so go read Ephesians. It talks a little bit about that. He also says that this gospel has been kept secret but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles. So this thing is now disclosed and that reminds us of Romans 3, about the manifestation of the gospel, the disclosure of the gospel. And it also reminds us of Romans 1:2 where Paul says that the gospel was promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. And so again it mirrors or bookends the entire letter. The gospel that has been disclosed, it was it made, it was told to us through the prophetic writings, the Scripture.

And then finally he talks about the goal was to bring about the obedience of faith. And that he uses that phrase here in the doxology, that reminds us again of the opening chapter of Romans 1:5. He says that it was through Jesus that we've received grace and apostleship to bring the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name. And so here once again you have another bookend to chapter one and this is something that of course scholars have noted and observed and whatnot.

It really is a beautiful ending to a beautiful book. The first part of the book is packed with theological significance. There's so many stories in each of the words in Romans chapter one. In the intro there verses 1-5, or 1- 7 especially. All that there is just very important and I think, if I remember right, we started off the podcast by looking at those words like gospel and obedience of faith and things like that. And here at Paul gives us those ideas once again and it is meant to bookend the entire letter.

So then he ends of course to say, ***to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory be the glory forever! Amen.*** And I think this is pretty cool. Because he seems to be dedicating his entire ministry and specifically perhaps say, this letter, to God himself. And it's a beautiful example once again of how our ministry should look. That we should be about the work of the Lord. But as we work on behalf of people we realize that this is really a work that's dedicated to God. And so in that sense Paul offers us a great reminder of how to just do ministry. And so the doxology is quite appropriate.

So this concludes our study of the Book of Romans. Thank you so much for everyone of who have listened. You've dedicated...like you deserve some sort of certificate for making it all the way through this series. It's been marvelous. It's been fun for me to dive into this text into these scriptures. And to once again meditate upon these words that I think just really convict me, encourage me, guide me, and I know they do to you as well.

I thought that we could actually end this series with a prayer taken from the Book of Common Prayer. a prayer associated with St Thomas Aquinas. It's a beautiful prayer that gives us a lot to think about, but it's one that if you don't have the words to pray, it is sometimes helpful to follow the guidance of those who have come before us in the faith. That great cloud of witnesses, the tradition itself can guide us into our own vocations and as we go about the work that God has given us to do as we dedicate our own work, like

Paul, to the only wise God. Here's a prayer that I'd like to end with. And make it your prayer. Make it your own. And I pray that it encourages you and I pray that God answers this prayer on our behalf, for us so that we can do the work that he's assigned us to do.

Give me O Lord a steadfast heart which no unworthy thought can drag down. An unconquered heart which no tribulation can wear out. An upright heart which no unworthy purpose can tempt aside. Bestow upon me understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and faithfulness that finally may embrace you. Amen.

1:05:35 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a Patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.