

Activate | Week 9

Romans 16:17–27

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We've arrived at our last week of studying Romans! Whether you've been with us since week 1, or have just started following along, I hope you have reason to praise God for this amazing letter.

Romans has shown us the power of the gospel. We've seen how a good, loving, and just God was worked to reconcile people to himself. The good news of Jesus Christ reveals how a righteous God brings sinful people into a right relationship with him. Through faith in Christ and by the power of the Spirit, people from every ethnicity, tribe, and class are welcomed into the family of God. No longer slaves to sin and death, they are brought under the reign of grace and life.

While we wait for our final redemption, we live as people of the Spirit. We are embodied sacrifices, given to God as an offering. We are members of the body of Christ called to show Christlike, sacrificial love to one another and the world.

Together we've worked to understand the core message of Romans. Hopefully you are allowing the Spirit to apply it to you personally. On week 1 of our first Roman's study, we talked about how often people come away from this book with a "Romans story." The Spirit can use this letter to speak right into someone's life and ignite their heart for Jesus.

As we wrap up Romans, I pray that you will be reflecting on your own Roman's story. Whether it has been a big, life-changing revelation, or a small, much-needed epiphany, the Word of God transforms.

Day 1

This week, we're doing things a little differently. First, we want to finish up chapter 16 and consider Paul's final thoughts as he closes his letter to the house churches in Rome. He has a final warning, a few more greetings, and one last prayer.

We also want to reflect on Romans as a whole. We've taken several months to work through this letter. While it's good to move slowly through such a rich and sometimes complex work, we can forget what came first and lose the thread of the whole thing. So, I'm going to challenge you to read the entire book on Thursday and Friday this week. In my Bible, it's only twenty-

two pages, so that's eleven pages at a time. Let's set aside the time and end our study by reading and reflecting on all sixteen chapters once more.

Today, we'll read through the final verses from chapter 16, so we can get the flow of his final thoughts.

Read the Word

Romans 16:17–27 (NIV)

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

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

²¹ Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. ²² I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. ²⁴

²⁵ 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, ²⁶ 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—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

- What is Paul warning the believers in Rome about?
- How does Paul define the gospel in verses 25–26?

Reflect

As Paul finishes up his letter, he has a few final thoughts to leave with the Roman church. Scholars estimate that the Roman church numbered no more than 200. In the huge city of Rome, they were a tiny minority. Yet they had the world's most earth-shattering message to live out and share. God had pulled back the curtain on the great mystery of how he would reconcile humanity to himself, and people to one another. The God of love would not be without his children. As brothers and sisters, we should not be without each other.

Like those early believers, we know and live the glorious truth of the gospel. This week, let's join Paul in his praise of the only wise God.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you for all I have learned through Romans. I give you all the honor and glory for your surpassing wisdom and unfailing love. Thank you, Jesus for what you've given me. Give me a heart that seeks you and the will to follow you.

Day 2

We may not think of innocence complementing wisdom. We may not think of peace as something that will crush. Yet Paul asks us to hold these ideas together as we consider his warning against false teachers.

Read the Word

Romans 16:17–20

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

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

- What warning signs does Paul say the Romans should look out for when detecting false teachers?

Reflect

In several of Paul's other letters we see his great concern over false teachers and the misinformation they spread. Near the end of his life as he writes to Timothy and Titus, he repeatedly emphasizes the need for "sound doctrine" and warned against those who would lie, distort, and manipulate the truth of God. He told Titus that an elder "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound

doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9) In his final charge to Timothy, he warns him of the allure of false teaching, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

We don’t know what kind of false teaching Paul is concerned with in Rome. It’s possible that this was just a general caution and not a specific warning. There were a number of early heresies that the apostles had to confront. The implications of the gospel, particularly in the context of the Hebrew Scriptures were still being worked out by the leaders of the early church. The New Testament was still being written, so people didn’t have the full Bible to consult. But Paul wanted to make sure all the churches held to the core doctrines of the faith as he taught them and weren’t swayed by false teachers.

While Paul doesn’t outline specific false teachings, but he does give some warning signs for recognizing false teachers. He first speaks to their motives — in short, they are self-serving and not Christ-serving. Paul has taken considerable time here at the end of his letter to show what Christlikeness looks like. Genuine sacrificial love and a desire to glorify God and bless others should characterize all Christ’s followers, especially those who teach and lead in his name. They should be humble and promote unity. The false teachers that Paul warns against sow dissension among believers and put obstacles in their paths.

He then speaks to the strategy of false teachers. Because they don’t have the truth behind their claims, they use flattery and deception. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent proved his ability to deceive and manipulate with smooth words. Paul may be alluding to the original “false teacher” who distorted God’s words, questioned his character, and led the first humans into sin. The same methods and motivations are shared by false teachers in Paul’s day, and our own.

Combatting false teachers requires both wisdom and innocence. Paul encourages the believers to be wise in what is good, but innocent of evil. A mind renewed by the Spirit will be discerning.

Paul ends this warning on a note of optimism. He knows the Roman believers have been obedient to the ways of God. Those who follow Christ closely can more easily detect those who misrepresent him. Recognizing counterfeits becomes easier when you are intimately familiar with the original.

But Paul’s greatest faith is in God. Even after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, he promised that the serpent’s head would be crushed. The peace of God gained through the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross will prevail.

- Where do you see teaching that bears the name of Christ, but strays from the core truths of the gospel? Do the people promoting these ideas resemble what Paul describes here?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you for truth that sets us free. Protect me from the bondage of false teaching. I want to follow Jesus so closely that I easily recognize anything that runs counter to his wisdom or character. Help me grow in obedience.

Day 3

Imagine sitting in a Roman courtyard alongside your brothers and sisters in the faith as Phoebe reads this letter from Paul. As she gets nearer to the end, your mind is reeling with the all the amazing truth packed tightly into this remarkable letter. You listen intently as she relays to you some greetings, and then finishes with a final, God-exalting prayer.

Read the Word

Romans 16:21–27

²¹ Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. ²² I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. ²⁴

²⁵ 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, ²⁶ 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—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

- Do you recognize any names from verses 21–23?
- What does Paul say about the gospel in verses 25–27? What is its result?

Reflect

Paul could not do the work of the gospel alone. He surrounded himself with trustworthy people. If you've read through the book of Acts lately, a few of the names that Paul mentions in verses 22–24 might seem familiar. Timothy was one of Paul's primary co-workers and "son in the faith." Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy directly to him. Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, and Erastus are all mentioned in Acts. Erastus was a well-known city official in Corinth. In 1929, an

inscription dated to the mid-first century mentioning an Erastus was found in Corinth. It was common in the ancient world to have an amanuensis who wrote out important letters. Tertius did this for Paul and is given the chance to send his greetings.

Paul finishes the letter with a doxology of praise to God. It brings us right back around to the opening of his letter. Look back at Romans 16:25–27 and then compare it with the opening to the letter. What similarities do you notice?

Romans 1:1–6

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Again, we see the prominence of the gospel as the revelation of the God and the pinnacle of salvation history. This history was documented by the Hebrew Scriptures and began with Adam, continued through the Jewish people and finds its fulfillment in Christ. We also again see Paul's emphasis on how the gospel applies to all people through their faith in Jesus. Paul ends Romans as he began, with a focus on Jesus and praise for God.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, you are the only wise God and you deserve all the praise, honor, and glory. There is no way to express my immense gratitude to you for my salvation. I am committed to living my life according to your will. I love you, Lord.

Day 4

We did it! We've made it to the end of the amazing book of Romans! Carve out a little extra time to spend in the Word today. Get out your Bible and turn to Romans 1.

Read Romans 1–8.

Here are a few exercises that will help you reflect on the letter. You might want to pick one or two to try.

- As you read, underline words or phrases that stand out. Write them down. How is the Spirit speaking to you through them?
- Write a two or three sentence summary of each chapter and then a longer summary of chapters the first half of the book that you could share with a friend who has questions about Romans.
- Record some of what you learn about God from these chapters. What about the individual members of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit? What do you learn about humanity's relationship to him?
- Consider journaling your biggest personal takeaways from the first half of Romans. What can you praise God for? Where do you feel a call to think or act differently?

Close your time in prayer.

Day 5

As we wrap up our study of Romans, we're going to finish reading through the whole book and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us through his Word.

Carve out a little extra time to spend in the Word today. Get out your Bible and turn to Romans 9.

Read Romans 9–16.

These are the same exercises that were listed yesterday. Do the same one again, or try a new one. Do whatever is most meaningful to you.

- As you read, underline words or phrases that stand out. Write them down. How is the Spirit speaking to you through them?
- Write a two or three sentence summary of each chapter and then a longer summary of chapters the second half of the book that you could share with a friend who has questions about Romans.
- Record some of what you learn about God from these chapters. What about the individual members of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit? What do you learn about humanity's relationship to him? How are we called to live?
- Consider journaling your biggest personal takeaways from the first half of Romans. What can you praise God for? Where do you feel a call to think or act differently?

Wow! Praise God for Romans and what we can learn from it. It is my heartfelt prayer that you have experienced God in your study. I pray that we have all grown in faith and will live out the call of this amazing book. May we remember all that has been accomplished by Jesus and live as Spirit-filled people who are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Close your time in prayer. Praise and thank God for what he has done, is doing, and will do for you. Praise him for his righteousness that is revealed in the gospel. Ask for the Spirit's guidance as you offer every part of yourself as an instrument of righteousness and a embodied

sacrifice. Pray for yourself, and all your Christ Fellowship brothers and who have gone through this study with you, whether you know them or not. May we find the genuine love, unshakeable unity, and divine purpose that Paul desired the Roman churches to have as we seek to share the love of Christ with the world.