

Chapter 16

The chapter consists mostly of greetings, but there's a warning, mentions for some of the team members and our hosts in Corinth, a blessing and a final doxology.

Verses 1–16 Sending greetings

These are the greetings. They are the traditional conclusion to a letter though there are rather more of them than usual. As it turned out, between us, the team and I knew quite a few people in the communities of Jesus-followers in Rome. Most of those we mention are the leaders of the different groups and the people who acted as hosts. The majority were non-Jews but there were a few Jews among them. In my comments I shan't mention all the names but point out the ones I think you might be interested in hearing about.

1–2. First mention goes to Deacon Phoebe. She's the one who took the letter from Corinth to Rome. I told the Romans to look after her. I told them that if there's anything in the letter that's not clear, just ask her, and she'd be able to help. She'd been a financial supporter of my work for some time.

3–4. Then come Prisca and Aquila. It still seems odd to put the woman's name first but she's definitely the leader. She and her husband wrote that marvellous sermon that I've already mentioned. These are people who took huge risks to help me. They are among the Jewish Jesus-followers who have done most to help the non-Jewish communities.

7. Notice that I included Junia among the apostles. I didn't mean that she was one of the 12 but that the churches recognised that she had been sent out by King Jesus as his representative to proclaim his message and to plant new communities. Whatever some later manuscripts and translators may think, Junia was both a woman and an apostle.

16. The greetings end with a call on everyone to greet one another with a kiss – something that sums up the mutual love that should exist within and between the communities of Jesus-followers in a city. In addition, I send them all the greetings of all King Jesus' communities.

The greetings remind us that while the letter is written to the different communities of Jesus-followers in Rome, individual people all matter and our friendships with them were really important to us.

Verses 17–20 A warning

This is a bit of a postscript. It gives you an insight into one of the many problems that we faced back in the day. Sadly, there were people who made it their business to go around all the communities, especially the ones that I'd started, telling lies about me. Most of the time they'd claim to represent James and the church in Jerusalem. This was not true. They taught what they thought James ought to be teaching but they were putting their words into his mouth. Lots of them know the scriptures really well and so they know how to bamboozle some of the trusting souls who lack experience. It can be very hard for new Jesus-followers to know how to argue with them. And they seem to get everywhere. Some of them are in it for the money, some are desperate to stop non-Jews from claiming they are part of the people of God and some are just misguided. They're all incredibly divisive. So, before

signing off, I asked Tertius, who was acting as scribe for the letter, to warn the readers in Rome to be wary of these people. You see, it occurred to me that if any of them caught wind of the fact that I'd written to Rome and planned to pay a visit there, they might try to get there themselves and start stirring up trouble.

17. There are people who go round undermining the work of King Jesus' ambassadors and teaching things which cause the communities of Jesus-followers to argue amongst themselves. They are best avoided.

18. These people often sound good and the simple-minded are easily taken in by them. Truth be told, they're just after your money.

19. You followers of Jesus in Rome have a reputation for being obedient to God and balanced in your thinking. That's great. Try to stay that way.

20. I couldn't resist closing off with a blessing to round off this section of the letter. In part of it I refer to an ancient promise. Even as the first humans were excluded from the garden of Eden and so from Life, God announced his judgement on the serpent, who I understand as the embodiment of the power of Sin. The offspring of the woman will crush its head. I take this as reference to King Jesus who has defeated the enemy. However, though beaten, that enemy is still active. I assured the Jesus-followers in Rome that his defeat will soon be complete.

I suppose it's true in every age that misguided and selfish people will distort God's beautiful message and that the gullible will be taken in by them. Their teachings are insidious and must be opposed.

Verses 21–23 Introducing the team

As I said earlier, quite a few people were involved in writing the letter and hosting the team while we put it together. This was the opportunity to mention them and to acknowledge their contributions. Most of you will have heard of Timothy. And I've mentioned Tertius already because he was the one who scratched out the words of the letter with his stylus. And then I mention a couple of Corinthian leaders, Gaius and Erastus, who were with us. We were in Gaius' house when we wrote the letter.

Verses 25–27 Glory to God

And I couldn't end without another doxology which sums up some of the key points I wanted to get across. It makes clear that any glory associated with the letter belongs to God and to nobody else.

25. God's promises were no secret but the way he had chosen to deliver on them was a mystery, one now revealed in King Jesus.

26. It was there in the prophets, and the meaning of these is now clear and their message can go to every nation to bring about obedience, the way of Life that God originally intended. This is the faithfulness of God and it should be celebrated!

27. What a display of wisdom! God has accomplished his ancient purposes through King Jesus and has brought Life. All the glory is his!

It was tricky to try to sum up the letter in just a couple of verses. I'll have another go. The key idea is that God has shown his faithfulness to his ancient promises and has brought representatives of the non-Jewish nations into the covenant people of God. We get to belong to this community through our allegiance to King Jesus. This is God's way of announcing in the present the outcome of the final judgement. Those who belong are transformed from within by the Spirit of God so that we begin to live out the true inner purpose of God's Instruction and so start to experience Life as God intended. This is a step in the process by which God will renew the whole of creation so that it fulfils all the plans God had for it when he first called it into being.