

After 9 months of working our way through the Book of Romans, we've come to its end. This, is the final chapter. Today, is the final message of this series. And everybody breathes a sigh of relief.

Sometimes, when I've read the book of Romans, I get to Chapter 16, and I find myself skipping through the first part of, because it's all about "Give my greetings to so-and-so"; and "Greet so-and-so"; and "Greet so-and-so". It seems to be like this never-ending "I hope I haven't forgotten anyone."

And then he says, "**Greet one another with a 'holy kiss'**". *By the way, do you know the difference between a "holy kiss" and an "unholy kiss"? About 20 seconds.*

But as Paul makes all of these greetings, he also describes what it is about these people, that makes them special...

First of all, he commends Phoebe to the Roman church. And we don't even know who Phoebe is. This is the **only** place in the whole Bible, where Phoebe gets a mention. But the fact that she's the only person who Paul is commending to them, makes it highly likely that she's going to be the messenger, carrying the letter.

And Paul is asking them to welcome her, and to help her out with whatever she needs.

Why??? Well, firstly because she's a sister in Christ – he says to "**welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints**"... This is not some unknown, undeserving visitor who's turning up – this is one of God's saints...

And I believe we have so much to learn about being hospitable to the saints of God. Would **I** welcome a stranger into my home, simply because another Christian has said to me, “Hey, this is a brother / This is a Sister in Christ”.... – **Would** we welcome them???? I hope we would, because these are the holy ones of God.

But there’s also **another** good reason for them to make Phoebe welcome. It’s because **she** has done exactly that, for so many others...**Phoebe** has been a benefactor. She has been a patron. **She** has supplied the needs of many other Christians (including Paul).

You know, sometimes we might start getting the impression that some Christians are givers – others are takers. That’s not the way it should be. We need to take a leaf out of Phoebe’s book. When Phoebe was able to be hospitable, she was the one who **gave** the hospitality. But when she left her home to go on a mission to the Roman church, the tables had turned, and now it was right for her to receive hospitality.

And sometimes those of us who are the greatest of hosts, are the **worst** at allowing somebody else to be hospitable to us. If you’re a giver, don’t be too proud – Be willing to receive. And if you’re someone who receives, make sure you give when you are able.

OK, so he commends Phoebe, because she’s a sister in Christ, and because she gives hospitality – and now it’s her turn to receive the hospitality of others.

And then Paul gives his greetings to a whole bunch of people. And I want you to notice, what it is about them, that makes them special.

Some of them were his “kinsmen”. That means they were his relatives. And we’d expect him to say “G’day” to his relatives, wouldn’t we?

But as he listed the attributes of these people, there were 2 things that really stood out to me. Some got special mention because they had risked their lives or been imprisoned for their faith....

But do you know the word that comes up the most???
Work!!!

- Priscilla and Aquila, were **fellow workers in Christ Jesus**.
- Mary, has **worked hard** for the Roman church
- Urbanus, is a **fellow worker** in Christ
- Tryphaena and Tryphosa, are **workers in the Lord**
- Persis, has **worked hard** in the Lord

Are you starting to get a bit of a picture here???? Faithful discipleship, involves **work**...

What were they working hard at???? For the Gospel, of course. They were working hard at getting the Gospel out to a world who need to hear it...

I wonder, do we realise how privileged **we** are, to be able to **work hard** in the Lord???

*One day, I was having a conversation with somebody, and they told me how they wished they lived in bigger place – somewhere the size of Toowoomba, so that they could be a part of a **big** church... And I asked them, what appealed to them about that. And they told me they just wished they could go to church, and not have to do anything...*

I felt really sad.

We live in a consumer culture. And for many people today, we've become consumers... And we've even become consumers of church, where the church will provide everything that I need. And if it doesn't, well, there's another one down the road that will.

I don't believe the Lord wants us to be consumers of church, where we just turn up and have church done to us...

It is an honour, and a privilege, to work hard for our Lord. *I hope that at my funeral, there will be those who say "He worked hard for the Lord" ... But more than that, when we meet the Lord face to face, what an honour it would be, to hear Him say, "Well done, Good and Faithful Servant". My prayer, is that He will say that, to every one of us.*

When Jesus said ^{Matthew 11:28} **Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** That doesn't mean that He doesn't want us to work... What it means is that He takes all of our burdens away; all of our cares; all of our worries; all of our strivings for worldly satisfaction and human accomplishment... ... And free of all of this, in the freedom, and the Power of God, we can work hard, for Him...

In Christ, we rest and work at the same time.

Let's move on:

In many of Paul's letters, it seems that the purpose of the letter, is to warn churches about false teachers. And his warnings against heresies and false teachers, very often seem to take front-and-centre stage. Not so, with this letter. It's only here, right at the very end, that Paul sounds a warning, to watch out for false teachers.

It **seems**, that the Roman church, don't yet have a problem with false teachers. He recognises their obedience, and he rejoices over it. But he is **also** very aware, that this position can change very quickly. He's seen it happen many times before. Even a good, obedient church, is in constant danger, of false teachers and their lies, wheedling their way into that church.

And false teachers and their lies, can very quickly destroy the work that God is doing. He tells us to watch out for them, and to avoid them – not to associate with them...

So, if we are to watch out for these false teachers, what do we need to be looking for?

Well, this time round, he doesn't name any particular teaching to be wary of, but he does tell us the traits of the person to watch out for. These people are:

- Divisive
- Self-serving
- Have a way with words

- Flatter (they'll tell you what you want to hear) (they'll make you feel good about yourself) (they'll remove whatever is offending you about the gospel)
- Teach what is contrary to the Gospel
- Persuasive

And with their smooth talking and their flattery, they **deceive the hearts of the naïve**.

Now, none of us like to think that we're naïve, do we? But the fact of the matter is, some of us are.

Paul uses a bit of a play-on-words here:

In the Greek, κακόν. (Kakon) means “evil”. You put an alpha in front of it and turn it into akakon), and it means “not evil” – “innocent”. (e.g. apolitical = “not political”)

And the word that our bibles translate as “naïve”, actually means “innocent”... They're totally unaware of the evil, and therefore they're in danger of falling into it. Do you see the logic?

And Paul is telling them, “**Watch out**”. Don't be naïve. Watch out for the smooth talkers; Watch out for the flatterers; Watch out for those who will introduce new teachings, and with their persuasive words, cause people to trip up and fall...

Have you ever noticed that some people will instantly recognise a lie for what it is, but others will simply fall for it???

Somebody comes along, who has a way with words, and they sound very reasonable, and they're very charming, and they introduce a teaching that **sounds** reasonable and it's very appealing, but it's just not true, and the naïve fall for it. But others will go "That's a lie", and they know it straight away.

How does that happen? There's 2 reasons:

- Some people are given a spiritual gift of discernment, and they supernaturally know, that a certain person is a false teacher, and that what they're teaching, is a lie of Satan.
- But the second way to recognise a lie, is to be well acquainted with the truth. And that (my friends) is why it is so important, for every Christian to be studying their Bibles. **Know** the truth, and then you will recognise a lie

And when you hear your preacher, if something doesn't sound quite right, check it out in the Word. I want you to be checking up on **me**. If in this message today, you think "Oh, that's a bit strange. I've never heard that before." I'd appreciate it if you don't stop me in the middle of the message, but when you go home, check it out in the Bible, "Is what I said true?"

And if you disagree with what I said, please, come and talk to me about it. I'm not infallible. I make mistakes. I can be wrong... And if I am, I need to be corrected.

I believe the warning for us to watch out for the flatterers and false teachers, is very important for us today. Today, we generally get taught to “always see the good in people”; “to celebrate their good things, and to turn a blind eye to their faults”. ...

Where is that in the Bible? It’s **not** there. In the church, we’re actually taught to do the opposite... We are taught to **watch out** for false teachers, and to have nothing to do with them.

I have seen what happens in a church, where false teaching is allowed to continue... I’ve seen what happens when the truth is stifled, and the Gospel is changed from something which transforms people, to something which just affirms them as they are...

What happens? That church will become divided. And those who have been deceived, stumble and fall... And of course, along with that comes a lot of hurt and a lot of pain.

I used to be part of a denomination who took on the mantra “Unity in diversity”. Meaning “You can believe what you like – we have a diversity of beliefs, but we are united”... Rubbish. False teaching does not unite – it divides.

So, be on the lookout for it...

Well, that brings us to the end of Romans. All we have left is the Doxology. And I could preach a whole sermon on this, but I won’t.

Doxology

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

You know, some ministers only go for half-strength with their messages – they will only ever preach from the Gospels (because that’s where the words of Jesus are). But the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ is found in all of Scripture.

- It begins in the Old Testament.
- And it’s expanded in the New Testament.
- We hear it in the preaching of Jesus
- We read it in the letters of the New Testament.
- But long before then, it was foretold by the prophets
- We sing it in the Psalms; and
- We digest it in the Proverbs....

The Word of God (the whole word of God) has power to strengthen us, according to His Good News in Jesus Christ.

Its purpose? To bring about the obedience of faith.

We’ve just spent 9 months studying the book of Romans. What’s its purpose? To bring about the obedience of faith.

Let's Pray,

Lord, we praise you for our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We praise you, that He died for our sins,

And that He rose again, conquering death, and bringing life.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of faith.

And we thank you for the purpose of Your Holy Scriptures –
to bring about the obedience of faith.

Lord, we have a little faith, but we desire for you to increase
it.

Lord, we thank you for the many ways that You have
strengthened us, as we have read this letter to the Romans.

And now Lord, may it lead us to obedience.

²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore
through Jesus Christ! Amen.