

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

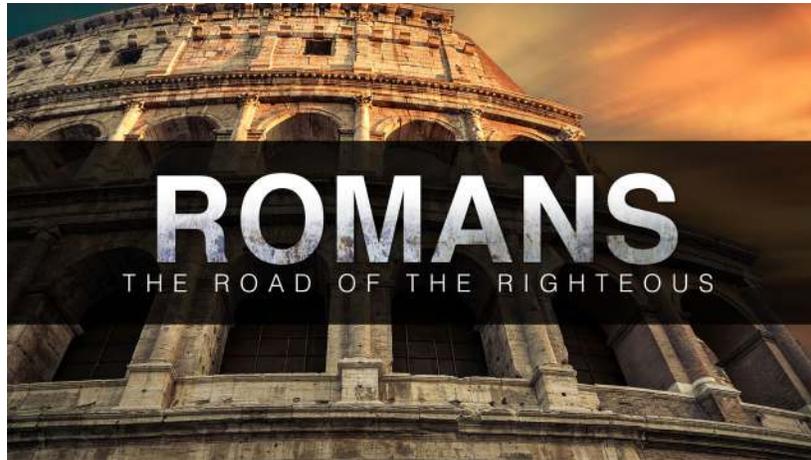
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 16:1-16

Written By

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Snapshots. We all have thousands of them on our phones. They are even categorized by date and place. If you are real industrious and have a lot of time on your hands, you can sub-divide them even further to really capture the message and meaning of each one of them.

Here is one capturing my daughter Amanda opening a present at her bridal party . . . already some ten years ago. Ah, here



is Amanda and her brother, Nathan, after she and Greg said their vows. Great shot. And, then, we have to have a picture of the twin granddaughter when they were just little girls. How cute.



Here's a picture of me and friend Rick at Disneyworld. He wanted to take

one more trip before cancer took its toll on him. Believe me, it was a journey Liz and I will never forget.



And speaking Liz, here she is smiling atop the fortress of Masada near the Dead Sea.

Don't you love snapshots? They immediately take you back to what you were doing at the time. In your mind you can even remember the emotion of the moment, the weather conditions, the laughter, the sadness, and sometimes even the smells. Yeah, to look at a snapshot is to be taken back to a moment in time, to pause and reminisce, and sometimes to learn from what the picture tells you about that snippet of time from your life.



In a way, Romans chapter 16, verses 1 through 16, contains snapshots of saints from Paul's cell phone. Two thousand years later the lives Paul mentions are pretty much etched away by the sands of time; however, it does not mean we cannot look at these snapshots and learn something from them by carefully analyzing them. So, come with me as we take a look at twenty-six people Paul sent greetings to as he closed out his letter to the Roman church. Here is, in my view, what we will learn from this unique portion of Scripture:

Physical Snapshots Lead To Spiritual Lessons (Rom. 16:1-16)

To look at these pictures of the church in Rome is to see people from all walks of life, from slaves to freemen, coupled with folks from many different ethnic groups. We know this because some of the names are Jewish (Herodian, Apelles), some are Latin (Ampliatius, Urbanus), and the majority are Greek. At first blush we see the power and influence of the gospel Paul has written about. It touches lives of people up and down the ethnic, social, political, and financial spectrum. Truly, in Christ they, we, are all one when we are justified by our faith in the loving Savior.

Turning our attention now to these names, which Paul lists off the top of his head in rapid fire succession, we have to state we will not be able to comment on each of them. Why? Some of the names give us additional information we can comment on and learn from, while some, like Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, and Hermes lack any additional information, which makes it hard to ascertain their value to Paul and us. I guess we will have to wait until glory to pick their brains and learn about their spiritual journey in the first century A.D.

With this in mind, let's start looking and learning from the snapshots which do give us some insight.

Phoebe: Serve And Support The Work Of The Gospel (Rom. 16:1-2)

Interesting. In a male dominated culture Paul opens his final words of greeting with a woman. Her name? Phoebe, which means "to be bright and radiant." Is that you? Does your love of Christ bring a light of divine love when you walk into a room? As we shall see, Phoebe lived up to the meaning of her name.

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and

that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well (Rom. 16).

Why did Paul commend her to the Roman church? A couple of reasons can be gleaned from Paul's words.

One, she was a servant, a *diakonos* (διάκονος), of the church Cenchræa (pronounced Sen'kre-a). Paul had probably led her to Christ during his 1 1/2-year stint of preaching and teaching in Corinth. Cenchræa served as the eastern harbor for Corinth, hence her exposure to Paul would have been readily available. Scholars debate whether she was just a woman known for hard service to Christ, which is the base meaning of the term *diakonos*; however, since the New Testament church did, in fact, have deaconesses serving alongside deacons (1 Tim. 3:11), and Paul calls her a "deacon of the church in Cenchræa," I think she was a leading deaconess in the body. This position meant she attended to personal needs within the body, especially those pertaining to women. Hence, Paul commends her to the church because she is a leader of sorts coming to them at his request.

Two, she is commendable because she served Paul by most likely bringing his letter directly to the Romans. This is why she is placed first in Paul's closing remarks. She had the high and lofty duty of making sure his letter arrived safe and sound. Ostensibly, this means she traveled some 600 miles by sea and land to deliver this letter to the saints. Imagine the arduous, costly nature of this trip. Talk about a servant. A servant does the hard thing. A servant is sacrificial. A servant does not focus on him/herself but on others. A servant is loyal and trustworthy. No wonder Paul chose her. She had a proven track record of being a servant of servants in the church Paul founded where she lived.

Three, Paul commended her to the church because, as he says, she had "been a helper of many, and of myself as well." The Greek for helper denotes a person who not only offers physical but financial assistance:

προστάτις, ιδος, ἡ [προΐστημι] 'one who stands by as a supporter' and so champions the cause or need of someone', **supporter/benefactor**, non-specific concerning kind of support (Danker's Greek Lexicon).

Based on this term, scholars are in broad agreement that Phoebe was a woman of means. She not only met practical needs within the body of Christ, which is what her role as a deaconess denotes, but she put her money to work supporting other saints. We do not know exactly what she did but we can guess. She probably met practical financial needs of struggling believers. She funded the work of her local church, and she provided the financial backbone of Paul's missionary endeavors. What a woman! She, to employ Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 8:7, excelled in giving. She also sowed greatly when it came to using her monies for kingdom work (2 Cor. 9:6). Phoebe lived out Dave Ramsey's giving strategy years before he hit the planet:

If you go through the process of building wealth with the purpose of leaving a legacy, your journey won't be NOW-THEN-US-ME; it will be NOW-THEN-US-THEM. That means giving well above the tithe—when you are ready.¹

¹Dave Ramsey, *The Legacy Journey* (Brentwood: TN, Ramsey Press, 2014), 180.

Phoebe was a woman who was ready, ready to physically serve and financial support. Oh, for more people like her in the body of Christ. We have many in our church and for that I am grateful for you position us to do much more for Christ, and you also set the pace by doing the hard work of ministry as well. That's a godly combination.

Prisca and Aquila: Be A Dynamic Duo For The Gospel (Rom. 16:3-5a)

Here are two of Paul's best Christian friends, and, boy, what friends they were in the work of the gospel:

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also *greet* the church that is in their house (Rom. 16).

Prisca, or Priscilla, was the wife of Aquila, a Jew from Pontus. Dr. Luke liked to call her Priscilla, while Paul enjoyed calling her the shortened version of her name. Interestingly enough, of the six times this couple occurs in the New Testament, her name always precedes her husband's (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:2; 2 Tim 4:19; 1 Cor. 16:19). Why? She could have come from a higher social strata than Aquila, or, as some have suggested, she could have been the more dominant one in their relationship and on their team. Scripture isn't clear, so we can't make a definite statement.

What we do know is how Paul came to know them.

Paul met them on his second missionary journey while in Corinth (Acts 18). Dr. Luke recounts the encounter:

¹ After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. ⁴ And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks (Acts 18).

Persecution by Emperor Claudius drove them from Rome to Corinth in 52 A.D. Being tentmakers, they quickly bumped into Paul, who most likely led both of them to Christ. Once saved, they grew in the knowledge of the Scriptures and the faith, especially sitting under Paul's tutelage for 1 ½ years (Acts 18:11). Over the years they followed Paul to Ephesus where they had a house church, and then we find them, as here, back in Rome after the edict of Claudius fizzled out. In Rome, they also had a church in their home, which was typical for them. Paul reminds the Romans that this dynamic duo stepped in the gap in a dangerous situation he faced and were instrumental in gaining his safety. This might have occurred when the worshippers of Artemis rioted in Ephesus when the gospel began to be showcased as being greater than their sex goddess (Acts 19:21ff). Also at Ephesus, this couple spent quality time helping the gifted Christian orator/teacher, Apollos, fine-tune his doctrinal understanding so he was even more powerful for Christ (Acts 19:1-7).

Now, what is most interesting about Priscilla and Aquila is they are ALWAYS mentioned together, ministering for the Lord. Wow, what a couple, and that's why I call them the dynamic duo. If you are married, I must stop and ask you, "Are you a dynamic duo for Jesus Christ?" What does a dynamic Christian duo look like? They serve the body of Christ in a variety of ways. For

this ancient couple it meant opening their home for church services, while for you it might mean hosting a Life Group, or being table leaders for youth small groups. They are known for studying, knowing, and applying the Word of God to their lives. They are known for disciplining others in the faith. They are known for taking risks for God, for making sacrifices to get the gospel out, and for supporting other saints who are working hard for God. Believe me, every leader needs a Priscilla and Aquila in his/her life for they are the iron which sharpens iron, and they are the stake which will hold your tree in place with, not if, the winds of adversity blow.

If you are married and you are not a dynamic duo for God, then it is time to put aside whatever encumbers you from achieving this lofty, godly goal. If you need some counseling to get your marriage in order, then get on with it. If you need to do some confessing, then do what you need to do to clear the air so you can move onward and upward. If you need to go to a marriage enrichment retreat, then pay for it and go, all with the goal of building your marriage so you can be what God designed it to be: a dynamic duo for the gospel.

This is who Priscilla and Aquila were.

Epaenetus: The First Of Many Converts (Rom. 16:5b)

This man was special to Paul and he says why in the latter part of verse 5:

Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. (Rom. 16).

The Greek for “first convert” is *aparche* (ἀπαρχή), and it is better translated “firstfruit,” a theological concept built into God’s people in Leviticus 23:9-14. When a farmer gave the first of his crop to the Lord it merely represented there was more to come. Applied to Epaenetus Paul is saying this man was the first of many Gentiles who came to the faith as he ministered in Asia Minor, or what is now modern day Turkey.

I pause for a brief moment to ask you two personal questions: “Who is your Epanenetus?” “Who is the first person you led to Christ which has led to many others coming to Christ?” Sometimes it just takes that first convert before God, then, opens the door to others. Additionally, are you still in contact with your Epanenetus? Since Paul stayed in contact despite the limited times in which he lived, I do not think we have any excuses, do we?

My prayer is that God would give you an Epanenetus. Let’s keep looking at the snapshots. There is more to see and learn here.

⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

Ah, let’s stop right here.

Ampliatus: Jesus Uses Any And All To Advance His Gospel (Rom. 16:8)

Concerning this man, Barclay provides this helpful analysis:

Behind the name of Ampliatus may well lie an interesting story. It is a quite common slave name. Now, in the cemetery of Domatilla, which is the earliest of the Christian catacombs, there is a decorated tomb with the single name *Ampliatus* carved on it in bold and decorative lettering. The fact that the single name *Ampliatus*

alone is carved on the tomb (Romans who were citizens would have three names—a nomen, a praenomen and a cognomen) would indicate that this Ampliatus was a slave; but the elaborate tomb and the bold lettering would indicate that he was a man of high rank in the Church. From this, it is plain to see that, in the early days of the Church, the distinctions of rank were so completely wiped out that it was possible for someone at one and the same time to be a slave and to hold a position of responsibility in the Church. Social distinctions did not exist. We have no means of knowing that Paul's Ampliatus is the Ampliatus in the cemetery of Domatilla; but it is not impossible that he is.²

A slave. A man with no freedom, no life, and no future. This is who Jesus used greatly in the Roman church. Amazing. You might be sitting here today and you feel like you are Ampliatus. Your life is going nowhere, you are low man on the social/educational/financial totem pole, and you just don't think God can ever do something great with your life. Think again. God specializes in freeing slaves from their sin, from their wicked, hopeless past and making them great in the kingdom of God.

What do you need to do? First, you need to say, "Lord, it's Ampliatus. Forgive me of my sin and use me, despite my limitations, to your glory." Second, you need to start being faithful to Him. Third, you had better get prepared to watch God work in your life in a profound fashion.

Let's keep moving down Paul's amazing list.

⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus.

¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman.

Hold it right there. We've got to delve into the household of Aristobulus.

Household of Aristobulus: The Gospel Impacts The Most Godless Political Families (Rom. 16:10)

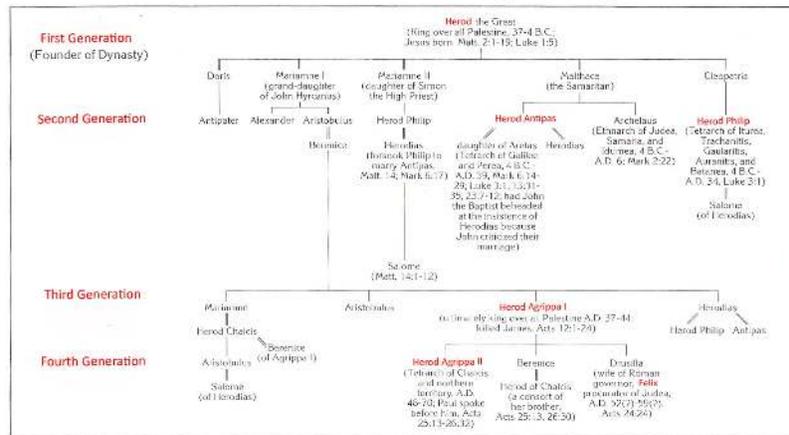
We know that Aristobulus, the grandson of Herod the Great, lived his life in Rome. Talk about a power-hungry, politically ruthless, and completely godless family. That was the line of Herod. His brother, Herod Agrippa I was cut from the same carnal cloth as their grandfather. His murder of James, the brother of Christ, tells us this much (Acts 12:1-24). If this Aristobulus is, in fact, the grandson of Herod, and the evidence appears to support this conclusion, then we are left with this observation: his household contained many believers in the Messiah, Jesus. You might need to read that again. The gospel had permeated the Roman culture so much so that godless people in power were surrounded (in a good way, of course) in their own homes by lovers of Jesus. Such is the nature of the gospel. It redeems the slave and works its way to the hearts of those who reject and hate God. It is never static, but is always dynamic. What was true then, is true in our day no matter where you work, who your leader is, or where you live. God's gospel is the leaven which brings impact by definition.

²William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 250.

If you are a believer at the CIA, DIA, White House, State Department, ICE, Homeland Defense or the like, one thing is for sure: God's gospel is going to profoundly touch lives. God's gospel is going to push back evil and darkness. God's gospel is eventually going to win the day in some of the most spiritual dark places on the planet.

We must keep reading about the gospel's influence in political realms.

A Genealogical Chart of the Herodian Dynasty



Reigning kings of New Testament times are in red. This is only a partial genealogy.

H. Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

¹¹Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord

Once more, we must stop and consider this man.

Lightfoot and Barclay both inform us that Narcissus was the name of secretary of the Emperor Claudius. He became very powerful and wealthy because all correspondence to the Emperor passed conveniently through him. Hefty bribes became the order of the day. Later when Claudius was murdered, Narcissus was forced to commit suicide. This meant his house, including all of his slaves, became the personal property of Emperor Nero. Again, if this information is correct, it means that the gospel had impacted the corrupt political world in a profound fashion. God made sure that people in close contact with these spiritually dead and morally rudderless leaders knew Him so the gospel could have the opportunity to touch the lives of the lost leaders. Is not the Lord the Good Shepherd?

Some of you know what I'm talking about because you work in a political environment rife with unrighteousness, and it does not matter who the President is either. At the top are always those who resist God, and love spiritual darkness over light. But you, like the slaves of Narcissus, are strategically placed to be the hands, feet, and voice of Christ and His glorious, life-changing, and culture-changing gospel. Magnificent.

But I digress. Come with me as we expectantly take a look at a few more snapshots

¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord.

All-stop one more time.

Tryphaena and Tryphosa: Frail But Fierce For God (Rom. 16:12)

The names of these two women, who were probably twin sisters, comes from the root which means "to live delicately." Amusing. How so? Paul probably wrote these words with a big, broad smile on his face. One the one hand, he knows these women sound like the dainty-types, but on

the other hand they are workhorses for God. When he says they were workers for God he uses the Greek word, *kopian* (κοπιᾶω), which speaks, as Barclay denotes, of toiling “to the point of exhaustion.” If the church had a children’s program, they were in the thick of the action. If the church had a parking team, they had the colored vests on and were directing traffic before they went to their classes to lead students. If the church needed Life Group leaders with the teens, they were there. If the worship team needed choir members, you could count on these twins. If meals were needed for a funeral or a wedding, you knew who to call. If the pastoral staff let a need be known to the church, you can guess who signed up first.

You know, I’ve seen Tryphaena and Tryphosa around here for many years. God bless you. I see and hear about your efforts for Christ, and He sees and smiles upon your work too. Because of you, we are able to do much for God. But I hope you understand that as we head to moving into the new building, we are going to need many more Tryphaenas and Tryphosas. Will this be you? When you hear about the need, will you step up and out? When you see the door open for service will you walk through it? Do it and God will get the glory.

We finish our analysis of this challenging and enlightening section with another amazing saint:

Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine (Rom. 16).

Rufus & His Mother: Sinners Who Became Saints In The Most Jaw-dropping Fashion (Rom. 16:13)

Who is Rufus? Good question. I think the Scripture gives us insight.

As Jesus headed to the cross, bleeding and bruised from his vicious beating at the hands of the Romans, Mark gives us this detail of what happened a Jesus staggered under the weight of the heavy cross:

²⁰ After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His *own* garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. ²¹ They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. ²² Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull (Mk. 15).

Ah, there it is: Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Coming from North Africa, Simon, a Jew, had gone to great expense to be in Jerusalem for Passover. As he anticipated participation in the high and holy day, he wound up standing in a crowd watching as criminals bound for crucifixion passed in front of him. One in particular did not look like he was going to make it with his cross up the mountain grade. His breathing was heavy, his legs weak and wobbly, and dried blood seemed to cover his entire body . . . and that crown of thorns on his head must have been beyond painful for its thorns were buried deep.

While watching this man pass by so he could get on with his day of worship, the Roman crucifixion detail conscripted Simon to come and carry this man’s cross the rest of the way to the hill called Golgotha. I’m sure this was the last thing he wanted to do this day. This was not why he was in Jerusalem. This would certainly cut into his desire to worship God on Passover, but he really did not have any choice and he knew it. So he stepped forward, and without a word he picked up the bloodied, splintery wooden cross.

Something occurred on the way up that hill that day. Simon must have looked into the eyes of Jesus. They were so full of love. I wonder did Jesus whisper anything to him, "Say, Simon, thanks for carrying my cross. I am the Passover lamb you have been looking for"? I wonder, did he stay for the rest of the crucifixion? Did he watch and listen to the words of Jesus as He died? I think one thing is for sure, he was never the same again. Somewhere Simon the slave of sin became Simon the slave of Christ and he shared that newfound faith with his family. I don't know if Alexander came to Christ, but Rufus did along with Simon's wife. What power the gospel has just at a time when you least expected.

Right at this moment you just might be Simon, a man going about your life, but now God has interrupted your day with a flash of revelatory light. Now you've looked into the eyes of love, into the eyes of the Son of God, and you know what you must do. You must believe in Him, and you must tell your whole family about Him because they are religious lost and they need to be found, found by the Good Shepherd.

I think you know that the family of Simon would have chosen had it been around in their day:

I'm forgiven because you were forsaken
 I'm accepted, You were condemned
 I'm alive and well
 Your spirit is within me
 Because you died and rose again

I'm forgiven because you were forsaken
 I'm accepted, you were condemned
 I'm alive and well
 Your spirit is within me
 Because you died and rose again

Amazing love, how can it be?
 That you, my king, would die for me
 Amazing love, I know it's true
 It's my joy to honor you

Amazing love how can it be?
 That my king would die for me
 Amazing love I know it's true
 It's my joy to honor you
 In all I do
 I honor you

It's now your turn to honor Him for He is worthy.