

Final Encouragements

Romans 15:22–16:16

Paul wraps up his teaching on the practical application of Romans 1–11 and begins to say his good-byes. It's obvious that he had a strong desire to visit with them face-to-face, but he was, to date, hindered from doing so. It was his hope that when he completed his journey back to Jerusalem that he would begin a fourth apostolic journey to Spain and that he would finally be able to visit with the churches in Rome.

Hindered by Satan (verses 15:22–24)

Paul speaks of being hindered during the course of his ministry. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 he said that he was hindered to come to visit with them because of Satan. He was perhaps thinking about Silas' and his mistreatment at the hands of the people in Philippi (Acts 16:11–40). It was there that they were beaten and thrown into prison. The Lord opened the prison doors, and the next day the government officials forced them out of the city when they found out that they were Roman citizens.

They were also hindered while ministering in Thessalonica by the unbelieving Jews. They caused an uproar within the city, leading Paul and Silas to sneak away under cover of night to the city of Berea (Acts 17:5–10). These confrontations between Paul and the unbelieving Jews occurred throughout his ministry years. Paul understood that Satan was working through evil men to stop him from spreading the Gospel of Grace.

Poor saints in Jerusalem (verses 15:25–27)

Paul was not going to be able to go to Rome because he was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver a monetary collection to the poor saints in Jerusalem. These poor saints are the Little Flock believers, those who were saved by the Gospel of the Kingdom before the Apostle Paul was saved. The Body of Christ saints felt compelled to help the Kingdom saints who were destitute. These are the saints who sold their possessions in Acts 2 and were waiting for the seven-year Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom. When the Kingdom was not established, because Israel rejected the call to come into the Kingdom, they were left with very little. There was also a famine at that time which exacerbated their condition.

Peter addresses the Kingdom saints who were wondering why God had not fulfilled the promises given to Israel as He said He would (2 Peter 3:3–10). Scoffers were trying to turn believers within the Little Flock away from what they believed by saying that Christ was not going to come back, that all things are continuing as they have been in the past. Peter counters that there is a day of judgment coming for those mockers. He then encourages the believers by telling them that their timing is not the Lord's timing. If the Lord said it would happen, it will happen. Tellingly, Peter does not encourage them with the Rapture, but by saying that the Lord will return as a thief in the night. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians with the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18) while Peter encouraged the Jewish Kingdom believers with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Those who try to harmonize Peter and Paul will lose the important distinctions between Israel and the Church.

As Paul traveled to the various churches on his third apostolic journey, he was collecting money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul had told the churches in the region of Galatia to collect money for the saints, and he told those in Corinth to do the same (1 Corinthians 16:1–4). As he made the return trip, he would pick up what was collected and he was going to deliver it to Jerusalem. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians praised the churches to the north of Corinth in the region of Macedonia for their generous giving. He used them as an example of how those in Corinth were to finish strong in collecting funds (2 Corinthians 8:1–15). Paul specially mentions the regions of Macedonia and Achaia in Romans 15 (where Corinth is located) as being very willing to give to the Hebrew saints in Jerusalem.

Striving in prayer (verses 15:30–33)

Paul was greatly encouraged to know that he was being prayed for. He also understood that it took effort for the saints to take time and pray for him. He asked them to pray that he would be delivered from the unbelieving Jews who were continually threatening him in almost every city. He was not only facing death everywhere he went, but he also was beaten, whipped, imprisoned, stoned, hungry, thirsty, cold, and on and on the list goes (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). It's no wonder that Paul desired that the saints become a part of his ministry by having them pray continually that he would be able to sustain his ministry of preaching the gospel. Prayer was the connection Paul had with other believers, even those whom he had not yet met, and a way for them to be connected to Paul's ministry.

Personal greetings (verses 16:1–16)

Paul finishes up by personally greeting 27 people by name. Of these, nine are women who were involved in active ministry, and six who were related to Paul. Aquila and Pricilla came from Italy and met up with Paul in Corinth. They were forced out of Italy by Claudius. They were tentmakers, as was Paul, and with their support Paul was able to devote himself to the ministry full-time. They traveled with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18) and eventually found their way back to Italy where they began a church in their home (Romans 16:5). There are possibly two more churches in Rome to whom Paul is writing. Verse 14 mentions one group of believers who are with Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, and Hermes. Verse 15 lists another group who are with Philologus, Julia, Nereus and Olympas. It's possible that there are even more small churches that make up Paul's audience.

Paul names several relatives, Andronicus and Junias (verse 7), Herodion (verse 11), and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (verse 21). Perhaps one of these relatives was Paul's sister mentioned in Acts 23:16. Her son found out about a conspiracy against Paul and warned those in charge of Paul about a planned ambush.

In Christ before me (verse 16:7)

One verse used by many to prove that Paul was not the first to preach the Gospel of Grace is found in verse Romans 16:7 which lists his kinsmen who were in Christ before Paul. If Paul were the first to be saved into the Body of Christ, then how could others be said to be in Christ before Paul?

Israel was told to be in him in John 15:4–5. Jesus was the true vine and they were to abide in Him. Those who were not in Him were going to be cut off from the nation of Israel and burned (eternal damnation). According to 1 John 3:24 the person who keeps His commandments is the one who abides in Him, and He in him.

There are two ways to understand the phrase "in Christ." Redemptively, all men need to be in Christ in order to have eternal life. This includes all men, from Adam to the last saved person. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam, all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Paul used the phrase *in Christ* to indicate those who have been made spiritually alive. This is in contrast to those who are in Adam and are spiritually dead.

Paul also has a special meaning of the phrase *in Christ* when speaking of the Church, the Body of Christ. Dispensationally, those in Christ have been given special privileges as clearly brought out in the book of Ephesians. As members of the Body of Christ, we have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). We have been chosen to be holy and blameless (verse 4), predestined to adoption (verse 5), sealed by the Holy Spirit (verse 13), seated in the heavenly places (2:6), to name a few. Many of these things are not promised to Israel, but only to those who have been saved following Paul.

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