



MEET & GREET

“CHURCH FELLOWSHIP”

A STUDY OF ROMANS 16 (PART I)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea. ²Welcome her in the Lord in a manner that is worthy of saints, and assist her in whatever way she may need your help, for she has certainly been a helper for many people, including me.

“I commend to you.” Paul understood the need for properly expressing Christian fellowship. Look at the following verses to come up with a good description of how Christian fellowship ought to be practiced.

- I thank my God every time I remember you. Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:3-5)
- Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind. (Philippians 2:2)
- And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? (1 Cor 5:2)
- James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9)
- Live with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:2-3)
- So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. (Philemon 17)

Paul writes about “greeting” many people here. Discuss what is meant by “greet” in this closing context. (Compare with Mt 10:9-14, Rom 16:23)

- Welcome warmly, receive and support. To fully greet and welcome a messenger or teacher was to agree with what they shared.

	<p>Discuss the descriptions and titles given to Phoebe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is called a “servant” which also can be translated as the title “deaconess.” There is no clear description here of her role other than supporting Paul and evidently delivering his letter to Rome. • Does this mean Paul encouraged women to take authority in the church? That would be contrary to other clear teachings. (compare 1 Tim 2:11-12) • The term is as broad as the English word “servant.” Example: The term can be very broad in scope (cf Rom 13 the government is “God’s servant”). • It can be applied in a formal sense to those who served alongside an overseer “bishop” in the church. Note when Paul referred to the latter, he assumed that it was a man (cf 1 Ti 3:8-12). • Note: she is from a port near Corinth and Paul is writing during his three-month stay there. He needed a letter carrier. <p>Describe the appropriate response to dedicated women like Phoebe who serve God’s people in various ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They should be commended to others and acknowledged for their faithful service. • They should be supported.
<p>³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life. I am not the only one who is thankful to them. All the churches of the Gentiles are as well.</p>	<p>Rate how invested these two were for Paul’s gospel cause. Discover one other important role these two carried out in Corinth. (1 Cor 16:19)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They risked their lives! • They had a home they opened up for a house church (16:5). <p>Read Acts 18:18–26 and explain how these two did mission work in Ephesus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had a home there which they used as a house church. They welcomed Apollos and gave him further instruction and correction on his teachings about Christ. • They evidently commended Apollos when he went to do mission work in Achaia (Greece) since they had previous connections to the church(es) there. <p>Explain: “Church fellowship has circular blessings.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You never know how the gospel will spread when you support it and encourage faithful mission work. • In this case we see how supporting mission work can return home to strengthen the places we’ve left behind!
<p>⁵Greet also the church that meets at their house.</p>	<p>Explain why house churches were common in the ancient church. How might this be applied to ministry today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They served as a meeting place when there was no synagogue, or the synagogue leaders kicked out the Christians teachers. • They can augment ministry efforts today or help with a mission start. Christians can open their homes and lives up to serve one another in various ways. • Several examples can be pointed to in our mission fields where it is not permissible, illegal, or dangerous to meet for Bible Study, but they gather in the basements and homes of people who support the spread of the gospel.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

Paul makes a note of the “first converts” in his mission work. Deduce why he might choose to highlight them.

- What is translated as Asia describes what we know as modern-day Turkey. Ephesus was a prominent church there.
- We know nothing more about Epenetus from the NT.
- The first people to convert would have faced the greatest persecution and uphill challenges. They need support and encouragement!
- These people are evidence of God’s working and cause for praise.
 - “Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15–16)
- Compare: (1 Cor 16:15-16) You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia (Greece), and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord’s people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it.

⁶Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

Find evidence here (16:1-15) that Paul was not in any way against women, even if he taught the headship of men.

- He does indeed teach male headship: (See 1 Corinthians 11:3) “But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”
- Nonetheless he wasn’t anti-woman. He understood they have various roles to serve God’s church and was grateful for their service in the Lord.
- Paul commends and greets 6-7 women here.
 - 16:3 ...Priscilla: “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus ... risked [her life] for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to [her].”
 - 16:6 Mary: “worked very hard for you”
 - 16:12 Tryphena and Tryphosa: “women who work hard in the Lord”
 - 16:12 Persis: “my dear friend ... another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord”
 - 16:13 Rufus’ mother: “who has been a mother to me, too”
 - 16:15 Julia Nereus’ sister

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and fellow prisoners, who are highly regarded by the apostles. They were in Christ before I was.

What can we say for certain about these two?

- May have been Paul’s relatives. (Cf. Acts 23:12–22) “the son of Paul’s sister” (his nephew) warns the authorities of the plot against Paul.
- Also, possible they were fellow Jews. “relatives/kin” used in Romans 9 to refer to fellow Jew. NIV translates as “Jew”
- Either way they converted before Paul and joined him in facing imprisonment.
- Jews in Rome? Emperor Claudius’ (41-54 AD) expulsion of Jews from Italy was at least three years prior. It is recorded in Acts 18 and by Roman historians Suetonius.
- Paul was in Corinth 57-58 AD when he wrote Romans. This was 3-4 years after Claudius’ rule. Many had been forced to leave, but many no doubt would have made a return by this point.

Explain the possible difference in meanings between translations and determine which fits best in context.

- They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles (CSB)
- They are outstanding among* the apostles (NIV) * footnote “or esteemed by”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ who are of note among the apostles (KJV) ▪ They are highly respected among the apostles (NLT) • It is not clear from the grammar if this means they are regarded as apostles themselves or highly regarded by the apostles. • If the former option were true, and they had the status of men like Peter and James, they probably wouldn't even need Paul's recommendation. Also, this would be the sole mention of any female apostle. Finally, female headship over man is not in line with the rest of Scripture. • Even if it meant they were included as among apostles, it was common for the man to take along his wife, and they could be regarded as a pair as they traveled. "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" (1 Cor 1:12)
⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.	<p>Ampliatus has no record or anything to attach to his name. But he has the unqualified recommendation of Paul as a dear friend. Discuss: Do you have someone you would call a "friend in the Lord" who otherwise might not be found in your circle of friends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People don't need any noteworthy connection. There is no greater connection than that we share in Christ and in ministry.
⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.	<p>No more details are given about these two men. Urbanus shared in gospel ministry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Paul know all these people in Rome if he hadn't yet gone there? This might be an example of how all roads lead to Rome. • Note: They still matter! These people are likely those who first provided encouragement for Paul as recorded by Luke: "And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. 16 When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. (Ac 28:14-16)
¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who was tested and approved in Christ.	<p>A possible variation of "Apollos" but there is not any confirmation that this meant the same man who was instructed in Ephesus and then went to Greece.</p> <p>Discuss: How are people "tested and approved" today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1) PERSECUTION They face a challenge or trial and hold onto the faith despite it. • 2) DISCIPLESHIP They complete college or seminary training and after a period of observing and working with them they are esteemed to be faithful to the Word of God in their teaching and life. • 3) ? A professional degree? This is least important since what God's people use is not the world's standard of qualifications or importance. They need to be tested on more than intellect, but character and faithfulness to the Word.
Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.	<p>What significance is there in Paul greeting an entire household?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There doesn't yet seem to be any formally organized church in Rome at this time. They all are families or meet in people's homes.
¹¹ Greet Herodion, my relative.	<p>Compare with "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives." (16:7) Also "Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives" (16:21) send greetings from Corinth with Paul. Discuss the</p>

	<p>implications if Paul was highlighting each fellow Jew vs highlighting each family relative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most translations take this word to mean “kinsman, countryman, Jew” but some take it as “relative, cousin.” Both are possible here. • If JEW: Jew’s were probably in the minority in the church at Rome. This would be evidence of that fact. • If RELATIVE: Paul’s own family could likely attest to the change in him when he came to faith as a miracle of God. • It is striking to think that Paul’s own family were believers with some of them were perhaps even before he was (16:7) Did he even desire to persecute his own relatives in his zeal against the gospel?
Greet those from the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.	<p>What seems to be implied about this household?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be that not all are Christians. A divided house. • How common is it for us to see households divided in faith? How should we respond: be sure to encourage those who do believe and let them know they belong to the household of God!
¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who worked hard in the Lord.	<p>Could possibly be sisters that they are mentioned together. Discuss: How would you define working hard in the Lord today? When and how ought we to give shout outs to those who work hard in the Lord?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working hard in the Lord would be a notable thing where you had to travel months to carry a letter or could face imprisonment or death. • Answers will vary: the point is that it is good to recognize those who labor in the Lord, thank God for them, welcome them etc.
Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard for the Lord.	<p>This is another woman highlighted in the list. Paul personally knows some of these people well and calls them “dearly loved.” Discuss: How would you define working very hard in the Lord today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are those who go above and beyond the ordinary. Share it! Encourage them. Don’t let them lose heart. • Point out their goal: they serve the Lord as they serve the gospel ministry.
¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who was a mother to me too.	<p>Discern what makes these two people outstanding in Paul’s list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly the son of Simon from Cyrene who carried the cross. This might explain the title “chosen in the Lord” and why Mark would mention the name as prominently known to his readers (Mk 15:21) • Though Paul had never been to Rome he had contact with this man and his mother. She is so close to Paul that he considers her like a mother! • Doesn’t every church need that woman who is a mother or grandmother to someone who doesn’t have one but needs nurturing love? • Consider how it feels for a missionary to enjoy a home cooked meal from a caring friend or to sit with them at a table on occasion.
¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.	<p>Possibly five prominent brothers who welcomed Christian brothers to meet at their home. The WELS is a smaller church body of under 400,000. It is a common joke that as soon as people greet within the WELS they make a “WELS Connection” of known pastors or relatives. Determine the pros and cons of this type of connection seeking.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This verse is more evidence that the church in Rome was not formally organized at this time.• Pro: It is good to share in those greetings and we shouldn't be embarrassed by our smallness and familiarity within WELS circles.• Con: people new or not familiar might feel on the outside if we don't urge them to be included and greeted.
<p>¹⁵Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.</p>	<p>Two more women are included here. By “the Lord’s people who are with them” we might understand this as another house church.</p>
<p>¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.</p>	<p>This type of kiss is mentioned in four other places in the Epistles, three times by Paul and once by Peter. It had no romantic implications. Describe what might be the equivalent in your culture. Evaluate if we practice this ritual as much as we ought.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shaking hands. Hugs. It wouldn't hurt to invite more appropriate expressions of affection among us. <p>Up to this point Paul has highlighted the positive side of church fellowship practices. Review all the positives that come from practicing fellowship with those who are united with us in teaching and practice.</p> <p>Proper Christian Fellowship practices allow us to joyfully:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Join in faithful mission work and support of it.• Support the building up of fellow believers and missionaries.• Encouragement in trials and hardships.• Stave off discouragement for those who work hard.• Encourage support of all those who faithfully serve Christ in every way.• Motherly, nurturing love for those who lack it for some reason.• Encouraging new connections made through our greetings. <p>NEXT UP: Now we get to see what is avoided, we avoid false teaching, factions, divisions, discouragements, cold greetings etc.</p>



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A STUDY OF ROMANS 16 (PART I)

¹⁷But I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching that you learned, and keep away from them.

Instead of sharing greetings and supporting someone Paul identifies an entirely different type of people. He urges his readers to watch out for and keep away from them.

Explain how we should go about identifying these type of people and how we “watch out... keep away from them”.

- These are not those who are simply new to the faith or immature and need to grow in faith. These are people causing divisions. This is someone who teaches false doctrine or supports practices contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.
- These are people who want to work with the church and be greeted, but shouldn't be welcomed as one.
- Paul doesn't necessarily say they are unbelievers, though that is a possibility. Consider what he writes in 1 Cor 3 about “being careful how you build on the foundation.”
- Watch out – doesn't mean be rude, but don't greet as if you work together in ministry. Proactively test and check others as faithful or not.
- Keep away – don't do ministry work together.

Where should we draw the line when it comes to “divisions” and “offenses”?

- We should strive to find common ground and unity, but not by compromising the Word.
- We shouldn't be willing to compromise anything which we are convinced is clearly taught in God's Word.

Identify one essential thing about Christian ministry if we are going to follow Paul's instructions here.

- “The teachings you have learned” You can't practice church fellowship if you don't invest time in Christian discipleship.
- Read 1 Cor 1:10. Paul doesn't say, “just agree on the Real Presence” or “Jesus is all you want to know.” He urges us to strive for complete unity in the faith.

Explain how someone's church affiliation or lack of it serves as a witness to others.

- The ministries we support and connect with matter. Synod or church membership is often used as a quick way to identify someone's confession without playing favorites or needing to go over all the teachings we believe with each new encounter.
- We can simply "greet" those in fellowship right away! We must first learn if we share fellowship or not if they lack any clear identity in faith.
- Generally if you belong to a church, it is because you agree with its shepherd and what that church is teaching and practicing. If not, you need to follow Paul's advice and watch out, keep away from that church.
- The lack of any prior affiliation doesn't mean that you agree with any new church you seek to unite with. First you should test what is taught.

¹⁸For such people are not serving Christ our Lord but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they seduce the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Paul lists the sad goal of those who stubbornly deviate from the clear teachings of Scripture. This isn't always apparent at first.

- They are serving themselves and what they want, not what God wants.

Identify one of the techniques of those who cause divisions. Explain why it is so dangerous for us to latch onto desiring worldly gifts for pastors and teachers in the church instead of what really matters.

- Smooth talk and flattery.
- Note: flattery is translated from our word for "eulogy" (praise).
- They use wise sounding words to make people feel good about themselves apart from Christ and his cross.

Identify the primary targets of those who cause divisions by false teachings and practices.

- The hearts of the unsuspecting. Sadly, the frequent victims of false teachers are innocent and they don't recognize the dangers!
- Men and women who teach falsely will emphasize keeping the human relationships intact without concern for the relationship lost with a holy God.
- Jesus calls on his disciples to be shrewd yet innocent. Matthew 10:16 "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

¹⁹Your obedience has become known to everyone, so I am very joyful about you. But I want you to continue to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our

What happens when fellowship practices are followed and Christians remain faithful and united in God's Word?

- It glorifies God and brings everyone joy.
- [Read 3 John 1-8](#) ...It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. ... We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth."

How can we be "wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil"?

- Grow in faith and knowing what pleases God
- Don't buy into the lie that you have to experience evil to really be wise.
- Discipleship and supporting faithful mission work together.

<p>Lord Jesus Christ be with you.</p>	<p>Paul identifies the real enemy and the real victor. Explain why this closing comfort is needed when contending for the gospel and striving to do faithful ministry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can get easy to get wrapped up in all the evil around us and the false teachings we contend against. • It may not look like it due to persecutions and false teachings, but Satan will lose. He can't stop the gospel. Jesus has already risen and rules over all. He will bring us the victory and will come again in glory!
<p>²¹Timothy, my coworker, greets you, along with Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives.</p> <p>²²I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.</p>	<p>Paul is not alone as he writes his letter from Corinth. He and his companions in Corinth are an example of the blessings of faithful fellowship practices.</p>
<p>²³Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you.</p>	<p>Gaius may be the same man who opened his home to Paul after he was driven out of the synagogue in Corinth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another prime example of what happens when we follow faithful fellowship principles and why it is needed. The devil is good at shutting out the truth, we need to be better at welcoming the truth and supporting it. • "This Gaius is often assumed to be the same person referred to in Acts 18:7. There we are told that after Paul and his Christian group were driven out of the synagogue in Corinth, they "went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God." The assumption is that this benefactor's full name was Gaius Titius Justus." (Armin J. Panning, Romans, The People's Bible) 254–255.
<p>Erastus, the city treasurer, greets you, and Quartus, the brother.</p>	<p>Many Christians were indeed poor, but not all. It included people in both low and high position in the ancient world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review 1 Cor 1:26-28 –(Not many were of noble birth or influential) • While working on an ancient paved square in Corinth, archeologists discovered a reused stone block bearing this Latin inscription: "Erastus, commissioner of public works, bore the expense of this pavement." That may be the same man who sent greetings to the Romans, but we cannot be certain. -People's Bible

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you—

according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was veiled in silence for long ages past, ²⁶but now has been revealed through the prophetic Scriptures and made known to all the Gentiles, in keeping with the command of the eternal God, resulting in the obedience of faith—

²⁷to God, who alone is wise, be glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen. ^(EHV)

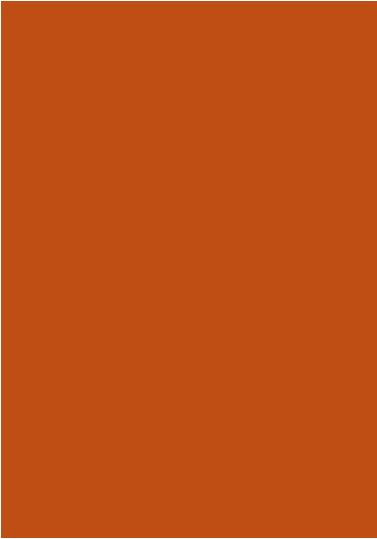
“According to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation...” God works through his gospel to strengthen his Church. Explain how this truth adds to the importance of church fellowship practices.

- The gospel creates and strengthens faith. It is dangerous to distort it, deviate from it, or diminish its role.
- It is vital to have sound teaching to be strengthened in faith.

“God who alone is wise”. One of the pitfalls when practicing church fellowship is giving the impression we are wiser than others or that our goal is to boast in ourselves. Create a list of ways we can glorify God alone when practicing sound church fellowship principles.

- We use our reason but make it subject to Scripture and remain humble as we teach his Word patiently and confidently trusting in him.
- The focus should be on giving glory to God and remaining faithful to his Word, not human intellect or worldly wisdom.





Share ways that Christian fellowship principles are often misrepresented or misunderstood.

Review the blessings of Christian fellowship and why it is so important to have sound fellowship principles.

Share what you appreciate most about Christian fellowship in your own experiences.

Created by Tom Barthel, pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Payson, AZ free to use and modify to fit your needs if you share in our fellowship.
(Otherwise you can still use it, but please don't change anything.)