



# BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER SIXTEEN



FAST FACTS

## ROMANS CHAPTER 16

- St. Paul asks the Christians in Rome to greet many people whom he met during his journeys.
- Among those greeted by St. Paul are Ss. Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila, and Andronicus and Junia.
- St. Paul warns against following false teachers whose doctrines divide the faithful.
- The Epistle concludes with a benediction summarizing the mystery that has been revealed to the faithful.

### ON THE CD

- WHAT DO I BELIEVE?
- THE VINCENTIAN CANON
- AVOID DIVISIONS
- COMMENTARIES
- INTERACTIVE QUIZ
- MUCH MORE!

## ROMANS 16

The concluding chapter in the Epistle to the Romans underscores the fact that the Epistle is not directly a theological tome: it is a personal letter from a Christian leader to a group of Christians, some of whom the leader had met in other cities.

We do not know much about many of the people named by St. Paul in Romans 16:1-16, 21-24: since many of the names were common among Roman slaves, it is likely that many were freed slaves the Apostle had met on his journeys. Despite the fact that the history of most of these early Christians is currently unknown to us, we nonetheless know about several of the people identified in Romans chapter sixteen.

St. Paul exhorts the Romans to greet St. Phoebe (whose feast day is September 3), who likely carried the Epistle to Rome (Romans 16:1). St. Phoebe is described as a "servant" of the Church; the word for servant - *diakonos* - is the same word for "deacon." Commentators disagree on whether St. Phoebe served as a deaconess in the early Church. Many commentators, such as St. John Chrysostom, state that she was a deaconess. Fr. Lawrence Farley, however, says that she was not, arguing instead that - as a wealthy woman - she probably served the Church by opening her home for services.

St. Paul also tells the Romans to greet Ss. Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their own physical safety to assist the Apostle, and who continue their practice of allowing a church to meet in their home (Romans 16:3-5).

He goes on to ask the Romans to greet Ss. Andronicus and Junia (whose feast day is May 17) (Romans 16:7). St. Andronicus of the Seventy was bishop of the Roman province of Pannonia (which incorporated such modern countries as Austria, Hungary, and Serbia), but he and St. Junia

## TRUE SPIRITUALITY

The new American spirituality revolves around the self: the individual creates a personal spiritual system to meet his or her immediate needs and desires. Americans have imported into our spirituality our demands for instant results; unfortunately, we will neither immediately experience perfect peace and, even if we experience some measure of peace and happiness, the experience will not last. We therefore hop from fad to fad, exchanging ancient spiritual disciplines for what George Gallup calls "the guru of the month." Such a foundation of self-centered experientialism can only result in a vicious circle in which we continually pursue new spiritual practices to undergo new experiences. We become the arbiter of truth, and the focus of our spiritual search, and therefore cannot see beyond our own narrow circle of fleeting and unsatisfactory experiences.

In contrast to the inherent limitations of a self-oriented spirituality, the Orthodox Christian spiritual life succeeds precisely because it removes the focus from the individual and places it upon God. The person therefore does not determine spiritual truth, but instead accepts and is formed by the guidance of the only God Who is Truth. Instead of futilely pursuing self-satisfaction, Orthodoxy leads the Christian into a continually deeper, transforming relationship with God; because such a relationship is our reason for being, it is the only source for *true* spiritual fulfillment. Finally, because the saints give evidence to the effectiveness of the Orthodox spiritual life, there is no need for Orthodox Christians to jump on the latest spiritual bandwagon. Only in Orthodoxy can the individual sing (as we do after Communion in each Divine Liturgy), "We have seen the true Light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit, we have found the true Faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, who has saved us."

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traveled abroad in missionary work. We do not know when they were imprisoned with St. Paul, but it was likely because of their successful evangelism, which reportedly resulted in many pagan temples closing and being converted into churches. When St. Paul numbers them among the apostles he does not mean that they are among the Twelve Apostles (as is he), but rather that they can be called apostles because they have faithfully engaged in the apostolic work of preaching the Gospel. They were martyred in the city that later became Constantinople.

After telling the Romans to greet each other with a "holy kiss" (Romans 16:16) - a moment in the Liturgy when Christians gave each other a ritual kiss as a sign of unity - St. Paul moves on to warn against listening to false and divisive teachers. He says that such individuals teach doctrine that differs from the Gospel taught by the Apostles, and that their goal was simply to deceive simple Christians in order to inflate both their egos and their financial holdings (16:18). St. Basil the Great, one of the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, teaches that Christians should avoid not only false teachers, but should avoid being deceived by the followers of these teachers: "As for all those who pretend to confess the sound Orthodox Faith, but are in communion with people who hold a different opinion, if they are forewarned and still remain stubborn, you must not only not be in communion with them, but you must not even call them brothers."

In contrast to indulging in heresy, Christians should be "wise in what is good" (meaning experienced and knowledgeable in the true Christian faith and living), but "simple concerning evil" (meaning that we should not allow ourselves to be deceived or misled by heresy) (Romans 16:19). While the presence of heresy can be upsetting, we should not panic, because Christ will soon crush Satan and destroy all his wicked works (16:20).

Origen explains in the third century the identity of Timothy and St. Paul's "fellow countrymen" (Romans 16:21):

*Timothy is well known from the Acts of the Apostles, where it is recorded that he was from Derbe, the son of a believing widow and of a Gentile father (Acts 16:1). Paul asked him to remain at Ephesus in order to warn the people there not to teach anything different from what they had been taught nor to listen to myths and endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:3-4). Lucius may have been the same person as Luke the Evangelist, because names are sometimes given in the native form and sometimes in the Greek or Roman one. Jason is the same person as the one who, when there were riots against Paul and Silas at Thessalonica, posted a bond for them so that they might have the freedom to preach (Acts 17:5-9). Sosipater was the son of Pyrrhus, from Berrhoea (Acts 20:4)...Paul calls them all his kinsmen because, although they were Gentiles, they were his brethren in the faith.*

The greeting from Tertius in Romans 16:22 is unique: it is the only verse in any epistle in which the scribe writing for St. Paul identifies himself.



St. Paul concludes his Epistle to the Romans with a benediction that summarizes the entire letter. St. Paul has taught - to the Romans and the world - the Gospel, a powerful message that had been hidden from the world until that astounding moment in time, where the full meaning of the prophetic Scriptures is now made available to all people, so that they might pursue "obedience to the faith" (Romans 16:25-26). Fr. Lawrence Farley explains the meaning and power of verse 27:

*Finally...the apostle comes again to life up the God to whom glory to the ages is due through Jesus Christ. He is the only wise God. What is this wisdom, which He alone possesses? It is the plan of salvation - the astounding love that would cause Him to die for His enemies and thus transform them into His children and heirs, the unsearchable brilliance that could use the divisions between Jew and Gentile as the instrument to save both, the unfathomable mercy that shut up the whole world in a sinking solidarity of sin that it might have mercy upon all. This is their God, the God who has mercy and who saves. And it is His Gospel that Paul is called to bring to Rome - a single saving Gospel for all men.*

