

His is more than a list of hellos. There are a number of possibilities why these greetings are important. But we need to deal with one issue at a time.

Paul commends Phoebe to them.

**RO 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.**

This is significant to us and to the church of that day. Why? Because it is believed that Phoebe delivered the letter, and thus became the letters interpreter. For that day and age for a women to do that was hugely confronting. Nearly as confronting the fact that Jesus appeared to women. In most of the cultures of that day women had very little, if any at all, rights so to speak. In many places a man's horse was more important than his wife. Women were not listened to, not to be taken seriously and had no right to speak in a court of law. In other words they had no defense. Yet Paul sends a women to deliver an important letter, usually the letter deliverer was it's reader and explainer.

This is truly liberating for women. She is called a deacon. Some translations make the word deaconess, but the word is diakonon. It is diakonos in the singular accusative. Interestingly enough it is a masculine gender word. In other words it is the same word used for all deacons. I have at looked at all of the New Testament references to women deacons or servants but from this reference we see that

1. Women are servants thus deacons in the New Testament
2. Women are spoken about with the same language as men in the New Testament
3. Women had a leadership role in the early church despite the cultural difficulties with that situation.

Paul says to give here receive her like you would other saints. (Saints are those saved by grace) **It seems to me that there is in this passage a great gender equality.**

The next verse continues this.

**RO 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Usually you would place the husbands name first, we still do that, but here Priscilla is mentioned first, that means she is the one of highest honour.**

First to be greeted are Priscilla and her husband, Aquila. Paul's friendship with them went back several years to his mission at Corinth, when they gave him hospitality, encouragement, and cooperation in the Lord's work (Ac 18:2). Their usefulness is confirmed by his taking them with him to Ephesus on leaving Corinth (Ac 18:18). When he left for Jerusalem, they remained there to lay the groundwork for his long ministry there (Ac 18:19) and were used of God in the life of Apollos (Ac 18:24-28). It was during the mission at Ephesus (Ac 19) that these "fellow workers" proved their mettle and personal devotion to Paul. They "risked their lives for me" (v. 4). Probably the reference

is to the dangerous riot that broke out, endangering the apostle's life (Ac 19:28-31; cf. 1Co 16:9; 2Co 1:8-10).

**Why Priscilla first?** We don't know, maybe she had a greater leadership role and Aquilla was the more in support, maybe Priscilla was the upfront person? Lots of possibilities but strange but important to take notice of.

The list includes other women to, but aren't there a heap of names.

Again, why? Paul had never been there, why be so specific?

I have a bit of a theory, and it is backed up by some commentators.

**I think there was more than one church at Rome.**

And **the list here is greeting each of the house churches.**

There was a house church at Priscilla and Aquilla's place

and at Epenetus,

and at Andronicus and

Junias place,

and at Ampliatus's place,

and at Urbanus's place (He sounds like the inner city mission),

the list goes on.

Just putting all the names listed here is fairly large so (26 names without families and households included) So I think that this is a type of list of house churches or church plants that the letter will be read to by Phoebe.

There is not one central body, not one central service but convenient, local and family based gatherings for worship and instruction about Jesus.

One of the big moves in ecclesiology both from a practical and an academic level is the move from mega or large churches to small gatherings but multiplying the amount of congregations.

One way of doing this is bible study groups, which we have a heap and more starting.

Another way is intentionally planting congregations (I use the term congregations rather than churches) in local areas. It is actually how most urban church planting happened in Australia. Is this a model for us to look at, Yep, if its biblical we need to work out how it fits with us.

We do it already with Sunday morning, Sunday night and Tuesday, Does that need extending? Well that would be the discussion.

Part of what makes me think this is his warning.

***RO 16:17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.***

It would be easy, with so many churches happening to have divisions and people more loyal to their house church than to the wider church. The warning didn't fall on deaf ears.

We know from history that the churches of Rome supported each other through the persecutions that were to follow.

The lesson though is here for us. Watch out for those who cause issues. The assumption is that it is people who cause divisions! Remember we talked about a while ago about disputable issues. And how we shouldn't get caught up in them. The principal flows over into this. If someone in our fellowship causes issues. Stay away. Doesn't sound very loving does it, doesn't sound like resolving the issues. I think Paul is saying if the issues aren't resolvable, don't keep confronting it – get on with ministry.

Look at verse **18. *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.***

Usually we can tell when people are doing things for themselves or big noting themselves. When they do that- stay away from them. Don't support them in it. And what's more it shows here their techniques. Smooth talk, flattery to get into people's good books. With the aim to deceive. I am not sure that the aim is blatantly deception. Often it is aim is material gain, political gain, perceived success or power. But they use deception as a tool for their own ends. And don't say it doesn't happen in modern day churches. We are just as a risk right here, right now as any time in history.

But look what Paul says next. (This is so cool)

**19 *Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.***

**RO 16:20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.***

He is kind of saying, but I hear you are doing good. Hang on, hang on. I know you are good people, loving people. I experienced it last week. Thank you for your messages, for your supply of food, for your prayers and for your encouragement. It has been so good this week to be able to share with people from other churches as they have rung to check up on me how support you lot have been – Thanks heaps. I love you for it!

Notice what he says next. I want you to be wise about what is good. Remember in the bible wisdom is about how to live life. Well Paul wants the Roman christians to live life well. And to not be aware of evil. Innocence in greek poetry is about not understanding. Paul wants us not to understand evil.

Verse 20 puts a perspective on it. God crushes satan not us. God uses our feet to do it, but it is God's doing. Hey it is great to know we have a powerful God able to defeat satan at every turn!!!!

Just before we finish up. Notice Paul didn't physically write the letter.

**RO 16:22 *I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.***

Tertius is Paul's amanuensis (the one who wrote down the letter at Paul's dictation;)

Paul has a habit of using other people in his ministry. Look at the list of people. All working together for the greater good. What would he write to us? Who would he commend. Me, I hope so, You I hope so. We work together for .....  
The perspective of who we work for is found in the benediction.

***RO 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.***

We proclaim Jesus Christ.