

Greetings

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[0 : 00] And I'd like you to open up your Bibles to Romans chapter 16.

! We are now in the final chapter of the book of Romans this morning. And we are going to be covering about half of this chapter this morning. You'll see why in a moment as we read why we're covering so much.

But we'll be looking this morning at Romans chapter 16 verses 1 down through verse 16 to Paul's greetings to the church at Rome. And so if you have found your place there in your Bible, I'd like you to stand again.

I know you just sat, but I'd like you to stand now that you've found your place as we read the Word of God together. Paul writes, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cancra, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever she may need from you.

For she has been a patron of mine, of many, and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risk their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

[1 : 16] Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Eponatus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners.

They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.

Greet Apelles, who is approved in God. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsmen Herodian. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa.

Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord. Also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobus, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympus, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All of the churches of Christ greet you.

[2 : 22] Father, we give you thanks for these words. For these greetings that the Apostle Paul wrote, so that we might be instructed by viewing the relationships that exist among these believers.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat for a bit. So this morning is the morning where we really test whether or not we mean what we say on most of our church signs.

The Bible, verse by verse. Is that for real? Are we serious about that? Are we going to skip over some parts? Are we going to skip past the things that a lot of times you'll breeze over in your Bible readings?

No. We're not going to skip anything. There is a temptation. I know if you do one of those year-long Bible reading plans where you read through the Bible each year, some of you have done some of those plans.

There is a temptation when you come to those chapters in the Old Testament where you have genealogy after genealogy to just sort of skip really quickly through it and maybe miss a few names and a few verses here and there.

[3 : 21] And then when you come to the New Testament, you begin to read some of these letters, some of these epistles, and you see passages like we see this morning where you have greetings and there is a temptation to kind of skip past those occasionally.

The genealogies and the greetings, they're difficult sometimes. It's difficult for us to understand and conceive of how is this relevant to my life? Why do I care that there was a guy named Aristobulus in the Church of Rome 2,000 years ago?

What impact does that have upon me? And yet if we believe, as Paul said, that all Scripture is breathed out by God and only breathed out by Him, but profitable, that is useful and good for teaching us and instructing us and in fact training us for righteousness, then there must be some purpose that God has for inspiring genealogies and greetings in the Scriptures.

And so this morning I want us to reflect upon these greetings that Paul issues to the believers in Rome and try as we look at those to discern and decipher what is it that the Lord wants us to learn from these things.

And I'll tip my hand to you at the very beginning that I believe that what God is teaching us through the Apostle Paul here is about the kinds of relationships that existed in the church in Rome between Paul and some of the believers in Rome that he had already met previously and the kinds of relationships that we ought to foster among one another.

[4 : 43] So let's take a look at some of the things that Paul says here. There are a number of things that I would like to point out to you, things that you might miss if you just read through this list really quickly. And the first few things that I want us to notice pertain to the vast differences between the various peoples that are listed in this greeting.

This is not a monolithic group of people. They don't all look the same. They don't all necessarily even speak the same primary languages. They don't have the same backgrounds.

They're not of the same social standings. There are many ways in which the people that Paul greets here are very, very different from one another. So, for instance, there are ethnic differences among them.

We know that because we've already seen in Romans chapter 14 that there were Jewish Christians in the church at Rome and there were Gentile Christians in the church at Rome. And we see that reflected as well in these greetings, that there are some there who are Jews, some even perhaps from Palestine, others Jews from other places in the empire.

And then there are, of course, it is the church at Rome. It's probably primarily composed of Gentile believers. So there are clear ethnic differences among the members of the church at Rome.

[5 : 56] Let's take a look at some of them. For instance, we already know that Prisca and Aquila, usually referred to in the book of Acts as Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul refers to as my fellow workers in Christ, we know from the book of Acts that they were, in fact, Jewish believers.

That they had been living in Rome previous to Paul writing this letter, and the emperor of Rome kicked out all of the Jews in the city of Rome. And so Priscilla and Aquila were forced to flee from the city of Rome, and that's when Paul met them.

Paul met them when they were in other parts of the empire around Corinth. So here we have two Jewish believers. There are some other Jewish believers, though, that are mentioned here. I think, perhaps, we can't say this with certainty, but I believe that Mary, in verse 6, greet Mary, who has worked hard for you, is probably a Jewish believer because Mary was a Hebrew name.

It's not attested among the Greeks and Romans of this period of history. It's a Hebrew name. Now, of course, within a hundred years, Christianity, having spread far and wide in the empire, you do find Romans and Greeks and others using various forms of the word Mary.

But I could not find any instances of it in the first century outside of the Hebrew people. And probably, she is probably a Jew from Palestine, or at least from a very traditional Hebrew-speaking Jewish family, because all of the other Jews that we see in this list have Greek or Roman names.

[7 : 20] Look down. You'll see a few more. Look down at verse 11. Paul says, Greet my kinsmen Herodian. We skipped over a couple of them in verse 7. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen.

Now, Paul consistently uses this terminology of kinsmen to refer to his fellow Jews. So we have a number of Jewish believers in the church at Rome, at least these few, perhaps more, but these are the ones that Paul himself is aware of, most of these that he knew personally, because they had been in other parts of the empire at different times.

But then, of course, the church would have been primarily made up of Gentiles, and probably Gentiles from various parts of the Roman Empire. After all, Rome is the capital city. It is the place where people stream from all over the empire.

So we have at least one mention of someone from another part of the empire. Look in verse 5. Greet my beloved Eponetis, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Now, I don't want you to be confused here. When he says the first convert in Asia, he doesn't mean the continent of Asia that we think of when we say Asia. At this period of time, Asia referred more or less to the northeastern part of the Roman Empire.

[8 : 29] But outside of Rome, outside of Italy, these were not Italians, these were not Romans. These were people who probably spoke some dialect of Greek, and they were of a different ethnicity than anyone in the church of Rome that was actually from Italy or from Rome itself.

So there is ethnic diversity in the church at Rome, and that doesn't prevent them from being a singular fellowship together and being united together in the body of Christ.

But there are other differences. There are social and economic differences that we can see if we read carefully here at the greetings that Paul issues. The first person that Paul mentions, who is, by the way, not a part of the church of Rome, but is going to the church at Rome, is someone named Phoebe, who we'll come back to in a moment and talk about her.

But one of the things that you need to notice about her is at the very end of the section on her in verse 2, he says that she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

So here is a lady who is well off. Patron means a financial supporter, a benefactor, someone who has helped support the Apostle Paul and apparently many other Christian missionaries because she has been able to contribute to them.

[9 : 42] In fact, she's from the port city of Cancra, which is right outside of Corinth. So she was probably a wealthy lady. Perhaps her family was involved in shipping and trading.

We don't know, but we know she was wealthy enough to be able to support a number of believers financially. And she's not the only one who apparently is of means here. Think about it.

Look down at verse 3. Greet Prisca and Aquila. And we are told in verse 5 to greet also the church in their house. This is not the only time we see a church meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's house.

We also see it happening in other places of the empire. So this was apparently a couple that was on the move and they were wealthy enough though, wherever they were, to own a home which was large enough for the church to meet in.

Paul mentions nearly 30 individual names in this passage in addition to a couple of different households and some he just labels as the brothers of so-and-so. So the church at Rome is not tiny.

[10 : 42] It's a fairly substantial for the first century. It's a fairly substantial church. Not like the church in Jerusalem, which in the early days had hundreds and even probably thousands of people. But it's a substantial church and it meets in a home, which means it must meet in a large home, a home belonging to someone of some means.

Well, we know who those people are. Priscilla and Aquila, people of means. They're probably not the only ones who are of means, but they stand out. And then on the other end of the spectrum though, we have some that are clearly not among the social elite.

There are a few names in here that are well known from this time as very common slave names. For instance, Ampliatus in verse 8.

Urbanus in verse 9. Well known names among slaves. And so there's every reason to believe that these men may well have been slaves.

There are references to those who belong to the family of Narcissus. Those who belong to a family are most likely slaves.

[11 : 50] And so we have in the church the wealthy, those who have enough money to support other believers and house the church in their home. And the lowest rung of society, we have those who are slaves.

So there's ethnic diversity, but there's also social and economic diversity within the church. And that does not prevent them from being united together as the body of Christ.

And those sorts of things should not prevent us from being united together as the body of Christ. It's been said by many, many people that the most segregated moment in America or hour in America is Sunday morning during worship.

That that is the time when we are more divided than any other along economic lines, along racial lines, along ethnic lines. And that simply ought not to be so. There's no reason for that.

There's no reason that we ought to be divided along those lines. Even here in the days of the Roman Empire when you had extremely wealthy people all the way down to slaves.

[12 : 54] You had categories that we don't even have anymore. And yet, they were all part of the same family. They were all part of the same church. And one of the things that we see about them despite all these differences is that they labored together in the Lord.

That's one of the things that characterized them. I want you to take a look and just notice the number of times that Paul mentions the work that these people do. Of course, he mentions Prisca and Aquila and refers to them as fellow workers.

And then Mary, who we mentioned, we're told that she has worked hard for you. And then you see Urbanus, who is also called a fellow worker.

Verse 12, he says, greet those workers in the Lord. And he mentions two sisters, Tryphena and Tryphosa. And then he mentions another lady. He says, greet Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

So I think that one of the things that characterized the church was that they served together. They were active in ministry together and they actively served one another. And that required their effort.

[13 : 58] It required an ongoing, regular effort on their part. Being a part of the body of Christ is not about simply sitting back and watching everybody else as they run around like busy bees trying to do things.

Being a part of the body of Christ means that you actively engage yourself in ministry, in the local body of which you are a part. And we see that all throughout these greetings.

These people work together. They labor together. They serve one another. They work. He says that Mary worked hard for you. They are doing these things. And yet even in that, there are distinctions.

There are differences in the kind of work and service that they render. So that you have Phoebe at the very beginning. Again, not a member of the church, but on her way to the church. You have Phoebe who's a financial patron who supplies money for others.

But then you have later on, you have Mary who's just simply referred to as a hard worker. You have others who are referred to, and we'll talk about this in a bit, as apostles.

[14 : 58] You have some who are simply referred to in broad terms as the beloved. So there are a variety of terms used to refer to these people because though they all labor together, though they all work together, they don't all do the same things and they don't all serve the same functions within the body of Christ.

And that should not surprise us. We see that in every local church. We see that though God calls all of us to be busy and to be about the work of ministry, we're not all going to do the same things so that our differences are not going to be merely ethnic or social or economic, but we're going to have different callings and different giftings.

And yet in all of that, we are to be united in Christ. One more difference that I want to show you here, and that is that, I don't know if you were paying attention as we read through here, but Paul issues greetings directly to ten different women in this list.

Now you might think that is no big deal, that may not surprise you, and of course it doesn't surprise you. We live in the 21st century. But in the day and age in which Paul was living to issue this many personal greetings to women stands out as somewhat odd, somewhat strange.

It wouldn't be strange for him to greet one or two women or those that he knew really, really well, but to have ten women that he names specifically. And the first that he mentions is Phoebe.

[16 : 23] Take a look at her. He says, I commend you our sister Phoebe. He tells them that they are to welcome her. Now in all likelihood, Phoebe is being sent with the letter that we are now reading to the church at Rome.

She is being entrusted with the delivery of the letter to the church at Rome. We can't prove that, but someone had to take it, and clearly he is sending her. So in all likelihood, Phoebe is the one delivering this particular letter.

They are to receive her, to welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints. And then when she gets there, they're going to have to help her out because it's not her hometown. I think this is probably the person who delivered the letter, not only because he's sending her there, but because, as I said, she's in Cancra, which is a port town of Corinth.

And most scholars believe that Paul wrote this letter from the city of Corinth. All those line up to say that he's probably sending this letter by the hand of someone named Phoebe.

But not only is he sending the letter by the hand of Phoebe, but look how he describes her. I commend you, our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cancra.

[17 : 30] Now, if you're reading some other translations, you may get other renderings of that, though most English translations refer to as a servant of the church at Cancria. But the word here literally is a deacon of the church at Cancria, which stands out a bit.

Now, there is debate as to whether or not the word deacon is being used here in a broad sense because it means servant, in a more general sense in which he's just saying, oh, she was just a servant in the church, or whether or not the term deacon is being used to refer to Phoebe as a deaconess, as someone who actually fulfills the office of deacon.

I would argue that it's probably the latter, that she is serving in the function of deacon primarily because this word servant is in a form that's masculine.

It's not in a feminine form. Greek is one of those languages, much like Spanish or French or those types of languages, that some nouns can have masculine endings or feminine endings depending upon to whom you are referring.

and this is one of those words that has a feminine form in Greek and yet here we find it in the masculine form. Why would it be in the masculine form used to describe a woman? It would be in that form if she occupied the office of a deacon and then when you add to that that she's not really referred to as a servant in the church but a servant of the church, I believe that she's occupying the official position of deacon.

[18 : 55] But what are we supposed to say about that? What do we think about that? A lot has been made of the role of women in the church I would say over the last 50 years or so, really since the rise of the modern movement of feminism.

There have been divisions, there have been arguments, arguments arguing as far as that women should be allowed to do everything in the church that men do. There are no distinctions. Others that place very strict and rigid distinctions upon women in the church.

And when we read a passage like this we have to think about these things in the context of the whole of the New Testament and ask ourselves what were the relationships between men and women in the church and what were the roles of men and women in the church in the first century?

What was expected? We know, of course, that Paul did place restrictions. Paul did recognize the differences of roles of men and women both in the home and in the church.

So, for instance, in 1 Timothy 2 he plainly says that I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority. What does he mean by that? I think that he means by that that the official teaching function of the Bible, of theology, and of doctrine within the church is reserved for men.

[20 : 11] And the authority roles such as elder or what many people call pastor belongs to men. I believe that Paul is building some fences there. He's making distinctions that there are roles within the church that are restricted to men.

We may not like that because of the culture in which we live, but we don't have the right to pick and choose which bits of Scripture we're going to follow and which we're going to reject.

We form our worldview and our understanding of everything based upon the Word of God regardless of what challenges that might present to us personally. And we see this pattern in the New Testament of yes, there are role distinctions between men and women.

In the home, husbands are to be the head of the home. And in the church, the elders of the church, the pastors of the church are to be men. And those who are tasked with the primary responsibility of teaching the Word of God to the men of the church are to be men.

That's what Paul says. But we have a tendency sometimes in recognizing those role distinctions and recognizing that Paul does set some boundaries to expand the boundaries outside of what the Apostle Paul and the other writers of the New Testament has set up.

[21 : 27] So that some argue that Phoebe couldn't possibly be a deaconess because she's a woman. But if that's what the text says, then that's what it says. And we don't have the right to twist it in some other way.

Of course, in the New Testament, the role of deacon was not a role of authority. It was, in fact, an official role of servanthood within the church. There is no contradiction between what Paul says here and what he says in 1 Timothy 2.

The two fit together hand in hand. So that we would want to say and recognize that while the role of elder or pastor is restricted to men within the church because the pastor and the elder is in authority over other men, we wouldn't want to eliminate all types of leadership to only men.

There are many, many ways in which women lead and in which they set examples and they serve and they do things within the church. And if we close those avenues off to them that God has not closed off, then we are depriving ourselves as a church of some of the great gifts that He gives to us.

And so let's have a biblical mindset about these things. But as I said, we are tempted to push things in one direction or another. Look down.

[22 : 43] I want to show you a place where things can get pushed in a direction that I don't think is good and healthy. When Paul says in verse 7, Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners.

He says next that they are well known to the apostles and they were in Christ before me. Now, I don't think that the translation that I'm reading here is the best translation.

Quite literally, what it says is they are well known among the apostles. Which implies and indicates that Andronicus and Junia are given the title of apostle here.

That is, among the apostles, they are well known. What do we say about that? What do we do with that? Is this a female being put on the same level as the apostle Paul and the other apostles?

Are women, though restricted by Paul in 1 Timothy 2 from teaching or exercising authority over men, are they yet here given foundational authority in the church? Well, I don't think so.

[23 : 54] Because when you recognize that the term apostle is used in two different ways in the New Testament, the difficulty and the apparent contradiction immediately disappears.

But there are some who want to appoint to this text and say, aha, here's a woman in the role of an apostle just like Paul. She has authority over men and therefore 1 Timothy 2 is negated.

Paul was wrong there. Really? It's all inspired by God. In fact, what you see as you read through the New Testament is that there are a number of times where the word apostle is not used to refer to an apostle, say, we might say with a capital A like Paul or Peter, but it's used in a more literal sense.

Apostle means one who is sent out. It's used to refer to simply a missionary. And I think that's the context. I think that's the way that the word is being used here that among the missionaries of the church, among those who are sent out, they are well known.

They are famous missionaries. Indeed. They're not apostles in the foundational sense of the term of those uniquely assigned by Christ Himself with authority over the church to write Scripture, but they are apostles in the sense of being traveling missionaries who go from city to city and help to start new churches.

[25 : 07] That's their role. In some ways, I think this term apostle may be helpful to think about it this way. It's similar to the New Testament word that we translate as elder. So many times in the New Testament, the word elder is used to refer to the office of elder, an official position of authority.

And we know that and we recognize that. But there are other times when the word elder is used simply to refer to an older person. How do you know which one it is? It's the same word, at least most of the time.

How do you know whether it's a more general use of the word just referring to an older man or whether it's a specific use of the word referring to a particular individual set apart and given authority in the local church?

Well, you pay attention to the context. Is what's being said about elders in that passage, does it contradict anything that's said about the official office of elder? In that case, it's not a reference to the office of elder, but simply to an older person.

You always interpret the Bible in light of everything else that the Bible says. And since we're given two options on how to understand the word apostle, it makes sense to interpret apostle here in a way that doesn't contradict with 1 Timothy 2.

[26 : 15] So why am I going into all this? Why am I saying all this? I'm saying this because we have a tendency and a temptation to push things too far in one direction or the other.

And in particular, for the last 50 years or so, some of the battles over the roles of men and women have been fought between people who want to push things too far to the edges, between those who want to erase all distinctions between men and women in the home and in the church.

And we're seeing where that leads now. Once you sever yourself from the gospel and you begin to push that agenda, you can no longer tell the difference between men and women anymore. But God has set up an order, not only in creation, but in the home and in the church.

But there are always those within the church who are tempted to draw the lines too closely. In fact, I spoke with a friend of mine who's a pastor not long ago and he was dealing with the frustration of if they had any woman on the platform for any reason whatsoever, he had a contingent of people in the church who would get really upset and claim that they were violating the role restrictions of women in the New Testament.

Even if she was just praying or even if she was just singing, he could not, he could not without creating controversy in his church have women do anything up front, though the Bible doesn't say anything about that.

[27 : 30] In fact, Paul assumes that there will be women praying in 1 Corinthians in front of the whole church. And so we have to recognize that in both directions there are temptations to either eliminate the barriers altogether or to pull them in too tightly and to restrict things that Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers, and most importantly God Himself through them does not restrict.

And one of the things that I want you to see in these greetings is the vital role that women played both in the church at Rome and in other churches. The church of Cancria is a great example here.

That there was so, there was such a great variety in the church and such a great variety of service. Men and women serving in the church.

Rich and poor serving in the church. Jew and Gentile, Italian and Asian, all working together in the church of Rome. What? To do what?

To proclaim the gospel and to help one another and to love one another. But of course, there is a key ingredient to this unity that exists among all of this diversity among these people.

[28 : 42] And it's spilled all over these greetings. Take a look at just a few of them. Verse 3, greet Prisca and Aquilo, my fellow workers. Underline the words, in Christ Jesus.

Or verse 5, greet my beloved Eponatus who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Literally, he was the first in Christ of Asia. He's in Christ.

Or, you can move down to verse 6 referring to Andronicus and Junia. He says, they were in Christ before me. They were saved before Paul was.

Or, for instance, Ampliatus who's called beloved in the Lord. Urbanus, a fellow worker in Christ. Apelles, in verse 10, is approved in Christ.

Verse 11, greet my kinsmen Herodian, greet those in the Lord. And in verse 13, greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord. There is a common thread that runs through these greetings and that is, these people, despite all of their differences, they are united together in Christ.

[29 : 52] They are one because they are in Christ. All of those differences, which seem at times to us to be insurmountable. And they do sometimes. I watch the news.

I see how much division there is even within our own country. I see how much division there is even in the 21st century between different ethnic groups within our own country. I see that.

I see it in our own communities as you drive through neighborhoods and you see, well, most of the people in this neighborhood have my color skin and then a few, couple of miles down the road, most of the people in this neighborhood have darker skin than I do.

I see that. I'm not blind. I'm aware. We have some differences that are going to be difficult to overcome. But if we will recognize that the key to overcoming those differences is not more educational programs, though those are important and good.

The key to overcoming those differences is not a policy. It's not political effort. The key is unity in Christ. If we are in Christ, then we become brothers and sisters with all others in Christ.

[30 : 59] Whether they look like us or not, whether they speak our language or not, whether they have a different income level than us or not, it doesn't matter. We are united in Christ.

Which means, in the context of this book, that you have trusted in Christ alone for your salvation. That you have not trusted in anyone else.

You have certainly not trusted in yourself. You are not counting and banking on your own efforts to get you into the kingdom of God and to make you right with God. To be in Christ, you must have put your faith in Christ and in Him alone.

And Paul is very specific throughout this book. He wants to make sure that we don't adopt some sort of vague spirituality or some general religion that just covers all people regardless of what they think.

Paul is very specific about the things that we have to believe in order to be in Christ. Let me give you just one example. There could be many, but let me give you one that's very clear.

[32 : 04] Turn back to Romans chapter 10. Because I think that we can be tempted at times to say that anyone who calls themselves as a Christian is a Christian.

Which leads to a number of problems, namely that we are at least outwardly uniting ourselves to people who may not be Christians and therefore they are not in Christ and therefore we're seeking a supernatural unity with people who do not have a supernatural spirit dwelling within them.

It's a problem. Chapter 10, look at verse 2. Paul is speaking of his Jewish brothers. I bear the witness that they have a zeal for God. I want you to mark that phrase if you haven't already.

They have a zeal for God. Now in our day and age among many churches, that's all you need. Zeal for God.

Say it any way you want. They sincerely believe what they believe. They are a spiritual person. Or in very vague terms, oh, they believe in God.

[33 : 12] Paul says these Jewish brothers of his have a zeal for God, but note, it is not according to knowledge. That is, it is not in agreement with the truths that have been revealed through the Scriptures and particularly through Jesus and his apostles.

Verse 3, here's specifically what knowledge these Jewish kinsmen of Paul are lacking. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

In other words, they didn't understand the gospel. They were still trying to earn a right standing with God. They didn't know about the free gift of righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.

And because of that, despite their great zeal for God, they were cut off from Christ. They were without hope. And Paul's prayer to them in verse 1 is that they might be saved because they're not saved.

I tell people frequently that if you want a doctrinal test, if you want to know how to tell the difference between true Christianity and false Christianity, you don't want to focus on the peripheral issues.

[34 : 25] things that might indeed in various contexts and at different times be important theological issues but are not at the core. You really want to focus on two primary things. Now we might squeeze in some others around them, but two primary things and that is who is Jesus Christ?

Who is He? So that in 1 John, John says that if anyone denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, He is Antichrist. In other words, what John is saying is even if you affirm the name of Jesus and yet that Jesus is a Jesus different than the one who made Himself known through the apostles, then you are not, you are not united to Christ.

You are against Him. You are Antichrist, John says. So the first question to ask in terms of the doctrinal test of is this person potentially a genuine follower of Christ is who is the Christ that they follow?

There are a number of counterfeit Christs that surround us and some of them look suspiciously like the real thing until you dig beneath the surface. It's a question you always have to ask.

Who is Jesus in their view? And then secondly, what Paul is addressing directly here is how do you get right with God? How do you obtain eternal life?

[35 : 45] How can you be saved? There are two potential answers to that. Christ and Christ alone has done all that's necessary for your salvation and you merely trust in Him and all that He has done?

Or you have something to contribute. You might still want to cling to Christ and His work and add your own. Or you may want to do away with Christ altogether and say it's all about what I do.

But if you add anything, it is another gospel. And the unity that we see that overcomes all these vast differences among the believers of the church of Rome is a unity that is rooted and grounded in the reality that they are in Christ and they are in Christ because they have trusted in the true Christ and they have trusted in Him alone to be their Savior.

And when that happens, when you are united with others who are genuinely following after Christ and genuinely in Christ, then it changes you and it changes the people around you.

The church is not a social gathering. The church is not a country club. It is something altogether different. So when Paul comes to the end of these greetings, he can say things that seem weird, right?

[37 : 03] He can say something like this. He can say, greet one another with a holy kiss. Whoa, that's weird. Right? It's weird. In our context it is, but in Paul's it's a familial greeting.

It's how you greet a family member. You can have genuine, authentic family with people who are radically different from you if you are in Christ.

And if you're not in Christ, then stop depending upon your own efforts. Stop pursuing your own means of getting right with God. Stop thinking that doing all of these things and checking off all of these boxes is going to benefit you in any way.

Turn from your sin and trust in Jesus. You'll be saved and you'll get a new family. Let's pray. Let's pray.