

Is there Room for Me?

Romans Series

Message 52

5.10.26 (Mother's Day)

Romans 16:1–16 (CSB)

PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF PHOEBE

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. ² So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.

GREETING TO ROMAN CHRISTIANS

³ Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epaphroditus, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews and fellow prisoners. They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles, and they were also in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those who belong to the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. ¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother—and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you greetings.

Introduction: Mother's Day

Rank	Male name	Female name
1	Liam	Olivia
2	Noah	Emma
3	Oliver	Amelia
4	Theodore	Charlotte
5	James	Mia
6	Henry	Sophia
7	Mateo	Isabella
8	Elijah	Evelyn
9	Lucas	Ava
10	William	Sofia

A. These are the most popular baby names for 2025.

1. But if I were to ask you what the best name was, the answers would vary.
2. The best name on the list, no matter what the rank, is a name of someone you love.
3. The others are just names, but when it names your kid or grandkid, or future grandkid, that name is your favorite.
4. I've heard it said that one of the dangers of being a public-school teacher is that some names are forever ruined for you.
5. For us, the power of a name is not the sequence of letters but the face attached.

B. Most of us tend to skip over names in the Bible, especially in lists.

1. Names only matter when we recognize them.
 - a. When we see names in news articles, online posts, or elsewhere, we usually skim until we spot one we know.
 - b. I'm not sure if kids will ever do this, but let's be honest: most adults have looked for people we recognize in court reports and obituaries.
2. The Apostle Paul didn't love names; he loved people.
3. As he finishes up with his greatest letter, he addresses several people in the Church at Rome.

C. For the next few moments today, we are going to peek into these verses.

1. What I hope we walk away with this is the answer to these two questions:
2. Is there room for me?
3. What has God trusted me to carry?

Text

A. Ancient letters often end by highlighting some of the most important themes in the letter itself.¹

1. One of the most important themes in Romans 16 is the wonderful mix of people.
2. It wasn't unusual for Paul to mention some people at the end of his letter, but he mentions 26 different people: 16 men and 10 women.
3. They come from all walks of life.
 - a. Some are presently slaves like: Appelles in verse 10 who belongs to a household
 - b. Others had been slaves and were classified as Freeman's (literally people who had been slaves but were now free).
 - c. Some worked or served in the Roman courts, with names like Urbanus.
 - d. One is named after a man from Greek mythology named Narcissus.
 - e. Some are Jews, some are Greek and Roman.
 - f. Some were wealthy enough to own homes big enough to host churches in their homes.
 - g. Others owned nothing at all.
4. 26 people, 26 stories of how Jesus rescued them from their lives of sin and was using them in the largest city in the world.

B. Not only is there an incredible level of diversity in the Church at Rome, but there is something else that is fascinating and important.

1. There are 10 women mentioned in this text.

¹ Preston Sprinkle, From Genesis to Junia, (David C Cook, 2026).

2. There is a long history of debate about some of these names.
 - a. In full disclosure, many translators, scholars, and pastors have argued about some of the names and the titles used in this passage.
 - b. But we can be confident that 10 of the names are women:
 - c. Phoebe, Prisca (or Priscilla), Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus's mother, Julia, Nereus's sister.

C. I'm really thankful that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to include these women in this letter.

1. Where would we be without godly women in our lives?
2. We need all of God's people to help shape and form us.
3. We need the ministry of women, and we need women in the church to do more than cook, and clean, and take care of babies.

That's where some of these women become controversial.

Called by Name

The Dynamic Duo: Prisca and Aquila

³Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. ⁵Greet also the church that meets in their home.

A. These are long-term partners with Paul.

1. We know they played a key role in Corinth.
2. They helped disciple and train a young and powerful preacher named Apollos.
3. Paul says they are his coworkers, they risked their lives for him, and they hosted a church in their home.
4. They were tentmakers by trade, and were fruitfully involved in ministry in the marketplace.

B. And Paul always mentions them together, and half the time he mentions Prisca first.

1. I don't want to stretch that too far, but it's interesting.
2. Paul saw Priscilla and Aquilla as coworkers with him, and partners together.
3. He seems to stress that they are a team, something that wasn't common back then and, to be honest, is not common now.

C. Some men and women are dynamic duos.

1. Priscilla and Aquilla shared in the work of the gospel together.
2. They shared in the ministry and hardship.
3. They shared the weight of this together.

D. Not everyone gets to do this.

1. If you find yourself with an incredible partner who is truly a coworker in life and ministry, thank God every day because that is a gift.
2. If you find yourself having to do it all alone for one reason or another, please hear me: what you are doing matters. Just because you don't look like Priscilla and Aquilla, that doesn't make you a failure.
3. If your partner is no longer beside you, that grief, that sense that a part of you is missing, is the receipt of love.

Quote: “Grief is love's souvenir. It's our proof that we once loved. Grief is the receipt we wave in the air that says to the world: Look! Love was once mine. I love well. Here is my proof that I paid the price.”

— Glennon Doyle Melton, Love Warrior

Juniaⁱ

Rom. 16:7

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews and fellow prisoners. They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles, and they were also in Christ before me.

A. Here is another husband-wife team.

1. Some translators argue that the name is Junias, a male.
2. Some scholars have argued the figure was male (Junias), believing it unlikely a woman held apostolic status, yet the female name Junia appears over 250 times in Greek and

Latin inscriptions from Rome alone, while the masculine form Junias never appears in ancient sources.^[1] Early church sources including Jerome and John Chrysostom, consistently attest to Junia as female.

B. What we have is a woman whom Paul calls among the apostles.

1. What does this mean?
2. That she was an accredited and valued missionary and messenger.
3. She was more than a cook, a cleaner, or a bookkeeper.
4. But she was a valued missionary in the eyes of Paul.
5. So much so that Paul includes her in the list of people to be greeted in Rome.

C. What do we make of this?

1. I think the Church has to stop talking like God made a mistake when He made women.
2. That's a bold statement, but the world has always treated women like necessary mistakes.
 - a. The ancient world attributed women to the same level as children or livestock.
 - b. In the Muslim world, women have no rights, no voice, no use in their kingdom or their religion.
 1. Consider that it is a reward of martyrdom for men to receive virgins in the afterlife.
 2. To this day, women are brutally oppressed in the Arab world.
 - c. Even Communism, the so-called equal society, denigrates women.
 1. Consider the 1-child policies of China that has resulted in untold abortions.
 2. A CNN article quoted a source saying:
 3. Over 30 years of China's one-child policy, an estimated 20 million baby girls "disappeared" due to sex-selective abortions or infanticide...²
3. When I read Romans 16, and 10 names are female, I am so proud to be a Christian.

² <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/18/china/china-one-child-policy-hangover-intl-hnk>

- a. That in the Kingdom of God, God loves all of creation.
 - b. He uses all of creation, Jew and Greek, Male and Female.
 - c. There may be differences in how he uses us, but He uses us all the same.
- D. One of the greatest legacies men can leave behind is how to honor women.
1. Your kids will never forget how you treated their mother.
 2. The way you treat your daughters and train your sons will greatly affect how your grandkids will be raised.

Rufus' Mom

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother—and mine.

A. I love what Paul does here.

1. He greets Rufus and Rufus' mom.
2. And he does what has always been done:
3. The mom's identity changes from her given name to her kid's name.
4. How many of you mom's go into public and are greeted with: Your so-so's mom!

B. This is fascinating.

1. Priscilla is named.
2. Junia is named.
3. Two other names, starting with T's are named
4. But this woman? Rufus' mom.

C. But there is a bit more, did you notice?

1. And mine...
2. The Apostle Paul's real mom is never mentioned anywhere that I can tell.
3. But Paul bestows upon his friend's mom this honor: My mom.

D. One of the hardest parts of being a pastor is that big, family holidays are our biggest days.

1. So in almost 15 years, from the age of 25 till 39, we only spent one Mother's day with our moms, back in 2020.

2. And now, we grieve a bit more knowing that won't happen again.

E. I can relate with the Apostle, in that many of the women in this Church have been moms to me.

1. Notice that the Apostle and the Pastor Paul didn't say "like a mom."

2. But many of you and some of those who have gone to heaven have been a mother to me.

F. Too often, we define our lives by what we are not.

1. I'm not a co-pastor like Priscilla.

2. No one is calling you an apostle like Junia.

3. But you know what someone is calling you?

4. Mom. Wife. Sister. Daughter of the Most High God.

5. When we define ourselves by what we are not, we rob ourselves of who we are.

6. Furthermore, when we define ourselves by what we are not, we rob God of the glory of what He has made.

Leads us to our last, and maybe most controversial.

Phoebe

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. ² So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.

A. Phoebe is a controversial figure in Church history, without trying to be.

1. She isn't controversial because she did anything wrong:

a. She's controversial because the Apostle Paul trusted her.

b. She's controversial because Paul calls her by name and title: servant.

2. It is believed that Phoebe was the letter carrier for the letter to Rome.

- a. That means that the Apostle Paul handed the letter to her, explained the contents, discussed how to deliver the message effectively, and sent her on the way.
- b. This is a big deal, so let me explain.

B. The Distance

1. Corinth to Rome is roughly 700-800 miles.
2. She would have traveled from Cenchreae (Corinth's eastern port, where her church was) likely by sea across the Adriatic or around the Italian boot, then up to Rome.
3. By ancient standards this was a major journey — weeks, not days. Likely 2-4 weeks depending on winds and conditions. It was not a casual errand.

C. A Woman Traveling Alone

1. Roman roads were populated with thieves, soldiers, and predatory men.
2. An unaccompanied woman of means was either extraordinarily brave or had some form of escort — the text doesn't tell us.
3. What the text *does* tell us is that Paul asks the Romans to receive her *worthily* and assist her, either financially or encourage her, or both.

D. Phoebe carried the Epistle to the Romans.

1. Not a note. Not a greeting.
2. The most theologically complex document in the New Testament canon — a letter that would shape Augustine, ignite Luther, and anchor evangelical theology for two millennia. The Book that has been debated the most, had the most commentaries and books written about, that has launched reformations and revivals, was carried by Phoebe.
3. She didn't know any of this.
4. But she knew that the words, written by Paul, carried weight and he trusted her.
5. The responsibility would have felt heavy.
 - a. I can't help but think of the line in Saving Private Ryan.
 - b. They send a runner with a message and he's shot.

c. The machine gunners shoot him some more, and the squad doesn't understand why.

d. Notice this quote: "As long as he has lungs and breath, he still carries the message."

E. And here's what we need to understand about ancient letter-bearing practice: the carrier *was* the letter.

1. When Phoebe arrived in Rome, she didn't hand it off and leave.
2. She read it aloud to the gathered church.
3. She fielded their questions.
4. She interpreted Paul's intent. She was, functionally, Romans' first preacher.
5. Paul knew this when he chose her.

He wasn't sending a courier. He was sending someone capable of standing in a room full of Roman believers — in the capital of the empire, in front of men and women, Greeks and Jews, slaves and freedmen, and handling the weight of that text with intelligence, faithfulness, and authority.

F. Romans 16 feels like a boring list of names to us.

1. But Paul knew all of these people, and he knew Phoebe.
2. So when the letter was written, and the ink had dried, Paul looked around and chose Phoebe.
3. Paul didn't send Timothy, he sent Phoebe.
4. He could have chosen dozens, if not hundreds, of people from the Church of Corinth to go for him.
5. He kept a strong team around him, and at any given time, several capable and godly men could have gone.
 - a. Some who had experience.
 - b. Some who would later carry letters themselves on Paul's behalf.
6. But on this day, this trip, this journey, this message...Paul chose Phoebe.

Is there room for me?

A. When I read these lists of people, I am reminded that there is room for all in the Kingdom.

1. The Kingdom is not divided over gender, nationality, race, or economic status.
2. The key to the Kingdom is faith in Jesus.
3. Do you believe in Him, and have you trusted Him with your life?
4. If you believe in Jesus, and demonstrate that belief through a life of living out His principles, then you are in!

B. Who can God use?

1. Everyone who believes is a servant in the Kingdom.
2. Men and women,
3. Homemakers and educators
4. Government employees and the unemployed.
5. Singles and married, widowed and divorced.
6. On Mother's Day, I want to clearly state: God calls all of us to significant, meaningful ministry and that includes women and girls.
7. The Promise of Pentecost is this: Your sons AND daughters will prophesy.

C. There is room for you in the Church.

1. Our giftings, titles, opportunities, and expressions will be different.
2. But they all matter.
3. Faithfulness to God means we don't live in competition; we live in community.

What is God asking you to carry?

A. Jesus said pick up your cross, and follow me.

1. I'm not sure what it is that God is asking you to carry.
2. Not everyone is a Phoebe.
3. Not everyone is part of a dynamic team like Priscilla was to Aquilla.

4. Not everyone will be named in letters.
5. Some of us may be more anonymous, like Rufus' mom.

B. Whatever God has handed you, carry it faithfully.

1. Whether it is across the world or across the street.
2. Whether it is the literal words of God, or the Love of God.
3. Whether your hands are full with children, with hardship, with sickness, or money, steward it faithfully and well.

C. Because we don't always know who is on the other end.

1. Stewardship is carrying a gift for someone else.
2. All of us are called to steward well the gift of God.

i **Junia in Romans 16**

Junia appears in Paul's greetings to the Roman church alongside Andronicus, whom Paul identifies as fellow Jews and fellow prisoners, and describes as "noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles" who had become Christians before Paul himself. ([Rom 16:1-27](#))

The identity and significance of Junia hinges on a critical textual question. Some scholars have argued the figure was male (Junias), believing it unlikely a woman held apostolic status, yet the female name Junia appears over 250 times in Greek and Latin inscriptions from Rome alone, while the masculine form Junias never appears in ancient sources.^[1] Early church sources

including Jerome and John Chrysostom consistently attest to Junia as female, though masculine forms have been introduced in English translations despite lacking ancient attestation.^[2]

If Junia was indeed female—which the linguistic evidence strongly suggests—her significance becomes substantial. She likely formed a husband-wife team with Andronicus, sharing his status as a Jew, early Christian convert, and fellow prisoner with Paul.^[2] She would represent the only woman explicitly called an “apostle” in the New Testament, and Paul’s description of her as “outstanding” among apostles indicates his approval of her leadership role.^[2] Paul’s inclusion of a woman among apostles in the broader sense of accredited missionaries or messengers aligns with their seniority in the faith.^[3]

The case of Junia thus challenges assumptions about women’s roles in early Christian leadership and demonstrates that female figures held positions of authority and apostolic recognition in the Pauline churches.

[1] David Mandel, in *The Ultimate Who’s Who in the Bible* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2007), [398](#).

[2] Bonnie Thurston, [“Junia,”](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), [756–757](#).

[3] T. B. Allworthy, [“Junias, Junia \(Ro 16:7\),”](#) in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church (2 Vols.)*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916–1918), [1:665](#).