

XXXVI. Apostolic Leave-Taking

May 23/24/25, 2017

Romans 16:17-27

Aim: To finish our 2-year study of Romans with an increased love of God and assurance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

A. Final Warning (Romans 16:17-20)

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These verses are grouped together for convenience' sake; they really fall into three separate parts: a warning about false teachers (vv. 17-19); a promise of deliverance (v. 20a); and a grace wish (v. 20b). The first section is not typical of Paul's letter endings; only here does he launch into an attack on false teachers, an attack, moreover, that interrupts Paul's greetings (vv. 3-16, 21-23). Paul has not said anything in the letter to this point that would suggest that there was any problem with false teachers. For these reasons, a few scholars argue that these verses do not belong in Paul's letter to the Romans at all. But there is no textual basis for omitting these verses; and the problems are not as great as some have made them. While Paul does not elsewhere warn about false teachers at such length in his letter endings, he does include exhortations and warnings (cp. 1 Cor. 16:13-14; 2 Cor. 13:11b; Col. 4:17; cp. also Gal. 6:12-15; Eph. 6:10-17). And 3:8 at least alludes to opponents of Paul.

Identifying these false teachers is almost impossible. This is because Paul is concerned to characterize them rather than to identify them. In an attempt to integrate the section with the rest of the letter, a few scholars have thought that the warning might relate to the dispute between the 'strong' and the 'weak' (14:1-15:13). But Paul's strong denunciation in this text is completely different from anything we find in the earlier passage. The two identifications that have had the most support are: 1) (gnostic) libertines; and 2) Judaizers. Perhaps, since we know that Jewish-oriented teachers plagued Paul through his ministry (cp. Galatians; 2 Cor. 10-13; Phil. 3), the latter suggestion has the most to commend it. But Paul simply does not give enough information to enable us to be at all certain. In any case, it seems likely that the false teachers had not yet come to Rome; his purpose is not to get the Roman Christians to exercise 'church discipline' against heretical church members but to put them on their guard against such teachers who might make their way to Rome.

Barnett

Who are these men, these agents of Satan (v. 20) who are 'deceiving' the Roman Christians? These men most likely are the 'objectors' we have encountered throughout the letter. It is not too far from the truth to say that one of Paul's reasons for writing this, his *magnum opus*, is to respond to the objections and criticisms of this group. It is fair to say, however, that few commentators see a connection between these men and earlier references in Romans.

The following observations may be made about these 'objectors' as we have encountered them throughout Romans. 1) They are Jews who, against Paul's Law-free gospel, seek to reinstate the 'works of the Law' (including male circumcision) as a basis for Gentiles' 'righteousness' with God and their acceptance by God in His covenant. In effect, they are attacking 'justification by faith alone, apart from works of the Law.' 2) They regard Paul as a renegade Jew who is disloyal to his people and who dismisses God's covenant promises to Israel (9:1-5). In effect,

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they charge Paul with saying that God is finished with His historic people and is only concerned with the Gentiles. These observations from the earlier sections of the letter are consistent with his present brief comment that they ‘server their belly’ (*koilia*) in v. 18a, that is, Jewish scruples to do with eating (see 14:1-23) rather than ‘the Lord Christ.’

1. False Teachers (16:17-19)

This section is forceful and lacks the careful restraint that has thus far marked Paul’s approach to the Romans.

This severe warning appears unexpected at the end of the letter. The warm commendation of Phoebe and the affectionate greeting to the several dozen named believers in Rome contrasts most markedly with the coldness towards these unnamed persons.

a) *Be Watchful (16:17)*

¹⁷*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*

Paul signals a shift to a different subject with his address, ‘brothers and sisters’ (*αδελφοι, adelphoi*). While this warning about false teachers appears to be an abrupt interruption in his closing greetings, it is not unrelated to its context. In conveying greetings from his mission churches to the church at Rome (v. 16b), Paul is probably reminded of the doctrinal threats that those churches have had to confront. He is worried that the same threat might be impending in Rome. ‘I urge’ translates *parakaleō*, a verb that Paul has used with varied shades of meaning in Romans 12-16. The translation ‘look out for’ brings out the warning nuance that the verb *skopeō* has here (also ‘keep an eye on’). Those whom the Roman Christians are to ‘look out for’ are ‘those who cause dissensions and stumbling blocks against the teaching that you learned.’ The definite article – ‘those’ – suggests that Paul has in mind a definite group of people and one that the Romans will recognize when (and if) they come there; but it need not mean that they were known to the Romans.

The mature Christ is to keep his ‘eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances.’ Paul is not talking about hair splitting over minor interpretations, or about immature believers who are divisive because of personal preferences, as disruptive and damaging as those things can be. Paul is here talking about something immeasurably more serious. He is warning about those who challenge and undermine ‘the teaching which you learned, that is, the divinely-revealed apostolic teaching they had received. ‘Keep your eye’ on such men Paul says. Mark them out as false teachers who are to be opposed and avoided. *Skopeō* (‘keep your eye on’) carries the idea of looking at or observing with intensity. It is from the noun form of that word that we get the *scope* in telescope and microscope. It means more than simply to look at, but to examine and scrutinize carefully.

Paul’s description of these false teachers is very general. As false teachers usually do, they create disunity in the Christian community. ‘Dissensions’ translates *διχοστασις (dichostasias)*, a word that occurs only twice else in biblical Greek (1 Macc. 3:29; Gal. 3:20). But more serious is their heretical doctrine. They create, Paul says, ‘stumbling blocks,’ which translates a word that Paul uses in Romans to refer to a spiritual problem that has the potential of leading to damnation. By further describing these stumbling blocks as ‘being against the teaching you learned’ (the phrase is parallel to 6:17 – *τυπον διδαχης, tupon didachēs*), Paul makes clear that he is thinking mainly of false doctrine. The seriousness of the threat they pose demands a

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correspondingly serious response from the Roman Christians: they must ‘turn away from them’; ‘shun’ them (*εκκλινω, ekklinō*).

Evangelicals who adhere strictly but unpretentiously to the inerrancy of Scripture and refuse to join ranks with those who claim to be Christian but who compromise or denigrate God’s Word are often wrongly accused of being divisive. But God’s true church is bonded by His Word and the power of His indwelling Spirit, who applies and builds the church on and through that Word. The ones who truly cause destructive division and disharmony, the ungodly ‘dissensions and hindrances’ about which Paul speaks here, are those who promote and practice falsehood and unrighteousness. No institution or movement can rightly claim unity in Christ if they are not unified in and by His Word. Whatever spiritual unity they may have is based on the spirit of this age, which is satanic, not godly.

Paul turns his attention to a serious apostolic admonition. He admonishes the Christians at Rome to notice the troublemakers in the church. They are to watch out for those who sow seeds of dissension, particularly those that disrupt the body of Christ with false doctrine. In the church today doctrine is decried. Doctrine divides, some say, so we ought not to give much concern to it but focus instead on loving, peaceful relationships. They forget that we do not know what a loving relationship looks like apart from how it is described by the truth of biblical doctrine. Paul does not say to avoid doctrine here; he says to avoid heretics. We are to avoid those who would come into the church teaching false doctrine.

The right response of believers to false teachers, especially those who teach their heresy under the guise of Christianity, is not to debate or dialogue. We are to ‘turn away from them,’ to reject what they teach and to protect fellow believers, especially new converts and the immature, from being deceived, confused, and misled. Although it is helpful for Christians, especially preachers and teachers, to have some knowledge of what liberal Christianity and so-called Christian cults teach, it is spiritually unwise and dangerous to be overly exposed to their falsehoods, whether through reading their literature, or becoming involved in their churches, colleges, seminaries, or other institutions. By doing such things many ill-prepared but self-confident believers have had their faith as well as their doctrine seriously subverted.

Paul briefly suggests three protective measures that need to be taken by a Christian church. First, in v. 17a he says, ‘watch out for those who cause divisions.’ Paul has no sympathy with theological sleepiness. Christians are to make a mental note of those who are off-base. Second: ‘avoid them’ (v. 17b). Heretics are to be spurned.

b) Be Wary (16:18)

(1) Belly Service (16:18a)

¹⁸*For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites...*

Paul explains further why it is so necessary to ‘turn away from’ these teachers. He gives two reasons. First, people such as these are not serving our Lord Christ but their own belly.’ What Paul means by ‘serving their belly’ is not clear. Paul uses similar language to describe false teachers in Phil. 3:19 – ‘their god is their belly’ – but the identity of the false teachers in that text is as uncertain as in this one. Some scholars think the reference should be taken in its most straightforward sense and that Paul refers to gluttony and, by metonymy, to a greedy and dissipated lifestyle. Others, however, think that Paul refers to the Jewish tendency to put too much stock in food laws. Most think, however, that ‘belly’ has virtually the same meaning here

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as the word ‘flesh’ often does in Paul; ‘serving their belly’ would then refer to egocentrism. Perhaps a combination of the first and third views makes best sense: these false teachers are interested in their own pleasure. In any case, the decisive point is really the negative one: they are *not* serving ‘our Lord Christ.’

Paul gives two negative reasons for turning away from false teachers. The first is that their motives are wrong. No matter how seemingly sincere and caring false teachers or preachers may appear to be, they are never genuinely concerned for the cause of Christ or for His church. They are driven by self-interest and self-gratification—sometimes for fame, sometimes for power over their followers, always for financial gain, and frequently for all of the reasons. Many of them enjoy pretentious and luxurious lifestyles, and sexual immorality is the rule more than the exception.

Such people are not in it for the building of the kingdom of God but for their own gratification, wealth, pleasure, and status in the community.

They are, indeed, dangerous, says Paul. First, they purport to be Christians, for why would Paul say they ‘do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ’ unless it appeared that they did? Where they Jews and nothing else, Paul would scarcely have spoken about them like this.

(2) Flattering Tongues (16:18b)

...and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

A second reason why it is important for the Roman Christians to shun these people is that they ‘deceive the hearts of the unwary.’ To be ‘innocent’ and ‘guileless’ (*ακακος, akakos*) can be a good thing; but it can also leave people open to the subtle machinations of those who would take advantage of them. It is this that Paul is concerned about. For Paul well knows that these false teachers are clever at dressing up their heresies in ‘smooth talk and fine words.’ The word *χρηστολογία (chrēstologia)* occurs only here in the Greek Bible and means ‘smooth, plausible speech. On the other hand, the word *εὐλογία (eulogia)* occurs frequently, and everywhere else in the NT with the positive sense ‘blessing.’ But the word can mean ‘fine speaking,’ and Paul apparently uses it here with deliberate irony: they conceal the content of what they say in attractive rhetorical flourishes. Those who are not on the watch for these people and who do not listen closely enough to what they are teaching might be led astray and into ultimate spiritual ruin.

Second, false teachers should be rejected because the results of their teaching are always destructive. ‘By their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.’ The many popular and sentimentalized gospels of ecumenicity and ecclesiastical unity proclaimed today reflect such ‘smooth and flattering speech,’ which disguises itself as loving and beneficent, while denying the central truths of the gospel. In the name of strengthening and unifying Christ’s church, they undermine its very foundation. In the name of bringing men closer to God, they drive them further from Him. Just as in Paul’s day, ‘they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.’

Second, they are bent on persuading others to their views, using ‘kind words’ and ‘flattery.’ The source of such fatally seductive speech and its original exemplar is ‘Satan’ (v. 20), who deceived the first woman and man. Paul regards the activities of these ‘deceivers’ in Rome as ‘satanic.’

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c) Be Wise (16:19)

¹⁹*For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*

Paul also gives a positive reason for avoiding false teachers. ‘For the report of your obedience has reached to all.’ The best protection against falsehood is adhering to God’s truth, just as the best protection against sin is holding on to His righteousness. Believers in Rome were protected against false teachers by their obedience to Christ and the truth of His gospel. Not only did their obedience protect themselves, but it also helped believers elsewhere who knew of and were encouraged by the Roman church’s reputation for godliness.

Paul, however, concludes on a positive and optimistic note. The report of the Roman Christians’ ‘obedience’ has gone out to everyone, so that Paul ‘rejoices’ about them. Yet he is concerned for them. He wishes them to be ‘wise’ for what is ‘good’ and ‘innocent’ about ‘evil.’ Paul may be echoing Jesus’ words: ‘be *wise* as serpents and *innocent* as doves’ (Mt. 10:16).

Paul suggests that v. 19 explains or gives the basis for something in verse 18. How it does so is not, however, immediately clear. But perhaps the clue lies in what seems to be an intentional play on the idea of ‘innocence.’ It is a play on the same concept rather than on the same word, because Paul uses different words for ‘innocent’ in v. 18b (*ακακος, akakos*) and in v. 19b (*ακεραιος, akeraios*). Paul warns that the false teachers are adept at deceiving the ‘innocent’ (v. 18b). And he issues this warning just *because* the Roman Christians have such a universal reputation for being ‘obedient,’ that is, innocent. Paul rejoices in this, for it is, of course, a good quality. But at the same time, he wants them to combine this innocence with ‘wisdom’ about what is good and to confine their ‘innocence’ to what is evil. In other words, Paul is recognizing and encouraging the Roman Christians’ ‘innocence’ in one sense – their freedom from sin as a result of their obedience to the gospel message – while he subtly warns them about another kind of ‘innocence’ – the kind that lacks wisdom and discernment about truth and error. As Bruce puts it, they should not be ‘so simple-minded as to swallow whatever is offered.’ Understood in this way, Paul probably alludes to Jesus’ saying about being ‘wise as serpents and innocent as doves’ (Mt. 10:16), for the meaning is much the same.

Yet, knowing that even the most faithful believers can fall prey to Satan’s traps, the apostle added, ‘but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.’ He echoed Jesus’ similar caution to His followers: ‘Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves’ (Mt. 10:16). To be ‘innocent in what is evil’ is not to be ignorant of it or to disregard it. We cannot abhor evil unless we have some idea of what it is. But to use a popular analogy, the only reliable way to recognize a counterfeit bill is to be completely familiar with the genuine bill. The only reliable way to recognize evil is to be thoroughly familiar with the ‘good,’ and the only reliable way to learn what is ‘good’ is to learn God’s Word.

The third protective measure is to ‘be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil’ (v. 19b). This is an echo of Jesus’ saying in Matthew 10:16: ‘be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.’ This is good advice because our tendency is to be as wise as doves and innocent as serpents. This no-nonsense advice eloquently demonstrates a second aspect of Paul’s horizontal love: it is *protective*. The connection is clear: when you really love people as much as Paul loved the Romans, you protect them. This is a great example for all of us. We need to love in such a way that we really put it on the line for others and speak the truth in love.

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There are many Christians who do not want to be engaged in a laborious study of the Word of God. They say that they want to keep their faith simple and childlike, but there is a difference between a childlike faith and a childish faith. We are to be childlike in terms of our acquiescence to the authority of God, but we are to be adults in our understanding. All we have been studying in Romans is not pabulum. We have been looking at the weightier things of God's Word so that we might not be simple in our understanding.

2. Feet Crushing (16:20a)

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

The promise of deliverance in the first part of v. 20 may be a general promise, completely independent of Paul's warning about false teachers in vv. 17-19. On the other hand, it could be art and parcel of that warning, Paul concluding with a promise that God would give the Roman Christians victory over those Satan-inspired heretics. But perhaps a mediating position is best, in which we view the promise as a general one, similar to others that occur in Paul's letter endings, but with obvious relevance to the false teachers that Paul has just warned the church about. The language of the promise may allude to the 'proto-evangelium' of Gen. 3:15d: 'you [Adam, or his seed] will strike his [the serpent's] heel.' If our interpretation is correct, the promise of victory over Satan, while including victory over the false teachers of vv. 17-19, is much broader, extending to the final eschatological victory of God's people when Satan is thrown into the lake of fire.

For those who turn away from false teachers and who are wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil, 'the God of peace will soon crush Satan under [their] feet.' Paul assures faithful believers that they can look forward to the day when their spiritual warfare will be over. Teachers of deceit and falsehood are instruments of the devil, and they will be destroyed when 'the God of peace' crushes Satan. In Romans 15:33, Paul refers to the 'God of peace' in relation to His divine provision for His children. Here 'the God of peace' is spoken of in relation to His permanent victory over Satan and his minions on behalf of His children. Paul uses the figure of Genesis 3:15, where after the Fall, God declares to the serpent (Satan) that 'He [the Messiah] shall bruise you on the head,' that is, inflict a mortal wound. The phrase *en tachei*, here translated 'soon,' has the meaning of speedily, or quickly. We know from the New Testament itself that Satan was not soon crushed from the perspective of believers living at that time. He is still not yet subdued.

Paul assures them that 'the God of peace' will quickly 'trample down' Satan 'beneath their feet,' which prompts us to remember God's promise that Eve's 'offspring' will crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). The present lack of 'peace,' through the divisions among believers in Rome, is Satan's doing but it will be put right by the 'God of peace.' Let those who open their mouths as teachers of the Word of God take great care to teach only the truth of the gospel, neither more nor less. At the same time, the 'God of peace' will ultimately prevail and triumph. God will always somehow preserve the truth of His gospel in the world.

This prophetic statement may have specific reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which would take place shortly after this letter was received. When it came, the great threat of the Judaizing heresy was removed from the church, the temple was destroyed, and those persecuting the early church were dispersed among the nations. However, Paul might have been referring to something altogether different. He does not tell us.

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3. First Grace (16:20b)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul's prayer-wish that 'the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you' finds a parallel in every other letter he wrote; and it also takes us back to the beginning of the letter (cp. 1:7).

Paul now gives a second short benediction (see 15:33). 'The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.' 'I know,' the apostle says in effect, 'that, even with your faithful obedience (v. 19), you need God's continuing grace to direct and strengthen you. You need His wisdom to give you wisdom to recognize false teachers. You need His grace to give you comfort and patience when you are attacked by Satan's emissaries while he is still in power over the world.'

Paul gives a preliminary brief benediction. Paul's greatest hope was that the people would continue to have the grace of God in their presence. He told us earlier that we move from faith to faith, from life to life, from grace to grace. Our Christian pilgrimage begins in grace, is sustained by grace, and is finished by grace.

The 'grace' of Christ springs both from the 'grace' He manifested in His incarnation and in His death and resurrection. Paul expanded on that 'grace' as revealing Christ's incredible generosity and humility in the words, 'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9). To hearers tempted, perhaps, to approach God based on the self-effort of 'works,' this prayer is pointed. From first to last, our salvation is 'by grace.'

B. Final Greetings (Romans 16:21-24)

Paul usually passes on greetings from fellow workers or local Christians at the end of his letters. But he usually joins them with the greetings he himself extends to his addressees. As we have seen, the greetings Paul conveys from 'all the churches' (v. 16b) sparked his concern about the potential of the false teachers who plagued those churches to disrupt the Roman community also. Thus, he departs from his normal epistolary practice to interject a warning about these false teachers before returning to his usual end-of-the-letter format.

Paul next sends greetings to the church at Rome in behalf of his companions, presumably men who were known by some of the believers in that city. I picture the scene in chapter 16 like this: as Paul nears the end of dictating his letter to the Romans, his friends gather around him in the home of his gracious host, Gaius. Tertius is writing down Paul's words, and Timothy, Jason, Lucius, and Sosipater really get into the long recitation of greetings to real flesh-and-blood people. Their hearts are warmed, and all three interrupt: 'Say hi for me.' 'Me too!' We see here that a heart that is filled with love is by nature contagious.

1. Protégé (16:21a)

²¹*Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you...*

Timothy, whom Paul simply introduces here as 'my fellow worker' (cp. also vv. 3 and 9), was Paul's closest ministry associate. A native of Lystra, in South Galatia, Timothy joined Paul's missionary team at the beginning of the second mission journey (Acts 16:2-3). Timothy worked with Paul throughout the rest of that journey (cp. Acts 17:14-15; 18:5). He was perhaps left behind in Greece or Macedonia when Paul returned to Palestine, and met up with Paul again when he returned to these regions on the third missionary journey. Paul does not mention

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Timothy in 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus, but he is included as co-author of 2 Corinthians, written from Macedonia. He was later with Paul during his Roman imprisonment (see Col. 1:1; Phm. 1; Phil. 1:1, 19-23) and worked with the apostle after his release in the eastern Mediterranean again (cp. 1 and 2 Timothy).

As this verse makes clear, then, Timothy was with Paul during his stay in Greece at the end of the third missionary journey (cp. Acts 20:3-4). Timothy's importance can be gauged from the fact that Paul introduces him as 'co-author' of six of his letters (2 Corinthians; 1 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians; Philippians; Colossians; Philemon) and as the recipient of two others (1 Timothy and 2 Timothy). Paul probably does not include him as a co-author of the Roman letter because Timothy is unknown to most of the Roman Christians and because at stake in the letter is Paul's unique apostolic mission to the Gentiles.

The first greeting comes from Timothy, a choice 'fellow worker' and protégé. He commends, praises, and gives thanks for Timothy twice in 1 Corinthians (4:17; 16:10-11), once in 1 Thessalonians (3:2), and in numerous times in his two letters to that beloved fellow worker.

Timothy was not entrusted with bringing Paul's second letter to Corinth but was dispatched from Ephesus to Macedonia. Now, however, Timothy is once again in Corinth, in a church he co-founded with Paul almost a decade earlier (2 Cor. 1:19). As an honored associate of Paul's his name appears first.

2. Kinsmen (16:21b)

...so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Paul tells us that all three of these men were fellow Jews (*συγγενεις*, *syngeneis*); and they probably were also delegates from the Pauline churches selected to escort Paul with the collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Some commentators object to this probability, arguing that Jewish Christians would not have represented Paul's 'Gentile' churches. But perhaps this is just why some Jewish Christians were selected: to demonstrate to the Jerusalem saints that the Pauline churches were not exclusively Gentile.

Next come greetings from Paul's fellow-Jews (*syngeneis*), Loukios (not 'Luke,' which is spelt differently), Jason, and Sosipater.

'Lucius' may be the native of Cyrene who was one of the prophets and teachers in Antioch who, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, first commissioned Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). Judging from the name alone, he could have been either Jewish or Gentile. Paul may have been using another form of Luke, who wrote the gospel that carries his name and was the only Gentile to write any part of Scripture. Paul refers to Luke as 'the beloved physician' (Col. 4:14) and mentions him in two other letters (2 Tim. 4:11; Phm. 24).

'Lucius' has been identified with 'Lucius of Cyrene,' a prophet/teacher in the church at Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1) or with Luke the evangelist ('Luke' can be a variant of 'Lucius'). But neither identification is very likely.

'Jason,' on the other hand, is very likely the Jason who gave hospitality to Paul during his brief and tumultuous stay in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9).

Paul refers to 'Jason and Sosipater' as 'my kinsmen,' probably indicating simply that they were fellow Jews, not necessarily relatives. If the Lucius just mentioned was a Jew, he also would

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have been one of Paul's kinsmen. One of the first converts in Thessalonica was named Jason and apparently hosted Paul in his home for a short while before the believers there sent Paul and Silas to Berea for their safety (Acts 17:5-10). We learn from Acts 20:4-6 that a man from Berea named Sopater (a shortened form of 'Sosipater') was among the companions of Paul who met at Troas after he left Ephesus. The fact that the Jason and Sopater mentioned in Acts were from neighboring towns that Paul visited in succession gives strong support to the view that they are the 'Jason and Sosipater' mentioned here, and that they not only were close friends of Paul but of each other.

'Sosipater' is almost certainly the 'Sopater' of Berea whom Luke tells us accompanied Paul when he left Greece toward the end of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). The name Sosipater (*Σωσιπατρος*, *Sōsipatros*) is a variant of Sopater (*Σωπατρος*, *Sōpatros*).

3. Scribe (16:22)

²²*I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.*

Tertius is otherwise unknown to us. He identifies himself in this verse as Paul's 'amanuensis' for Romans: the one who 'wrote down' (*γραψας*, *grapsas*) what Paul dictated. After his hard work, Paul gives him the opportunity to extend Christian greetings to the Roman Christians in his own name.

Tertius, the 'writer of the letter,' adds his own signature greeting. Paul often used a scribe in writing his letters (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Th. 3:17). While in other letters the amanuensis may have had some freedom of expression, in so important a letter as this it is likely that Paul carefully dictated every word.

Tertius was Paul's secretary, or amanuensis, who penned 'this letter' that Paul dictated to him, and who here inserts his own greeting. Just as Phoebe had the great privilege of delivering the book of Romans, 'Tertius' had the great privilege of writing it for Paul.

Tertius adds his personal greetings, identifying himself as the one who wrote the epistle. In the vast majority of cases, Paul did not write with his own hand. He had significant problems with his vision. On one occasion he did write his letter: 'See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! (Gal. 6:11), but typically he, as well as many others, used a personal secretary called an amanuensis. The practice dates back to the Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah had an amanuensis who took down his words. Here Paul had been dictating the letter to the church at Rome, and Tertius, which means 'the third,' has been recording this magnificent epistle dutifully and carefully under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

4. Corinthians (16:23)

a) *Gaius (16:23a)*

²³*Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you.*

'Gaius' was a common name; and at least three different men in the NT bore it: Gaius 'of Derbe' (Acts 20:4; cp. 19:29); a Gaius from Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14); and a Gaius who was a church leader in Asia Minor (3 John 1). The Gaius whom Paul greets here was almost certainly Gaius of Corinth, since Paul was writing Romans from Corinth. He may very well be identified also with Titius Justus, who gave Paul lodging on his first stay in Corinth (Acts 18:7). His full name would then have been Gaius Titius Justus, Gaius being his praenomen. The role that Gaius

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played in Corinth is not perfectly clear, for Paul's description of Gaius could mean either that he was the 'host' (*ξενος*, *xenos*) of the entire church in Corinth, or that he was the 'host' to any Christian from 'the whole church' who might pass through Corinth. Certainty is impossible, but the second option might be preferable, since it is unlikely that the entire church at Corinth would have met in one house.

Gaius was a 'host to' Paul as well as 'to the whole church,' probably referring to a congregation that met in his house. Because the book of Romans was written from Corinth, this Gaius almost certainly was among the many believers in Corinth who came to faith in Christ through the ministry of Paul and was one of the two men in that church whom Paul had baptized personally (1 Cor. 1:14). He is generally thought to be 'Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue' in Corinth (Acts 18:7) and whose full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus.

Gaius also sends his greetings. Probably this is the 'Gaius' of 1 Corinthians 1:14, whose complete Roman name was Gaius Titius Justus, the God-fearer who attended the synagogue in Corinth and whose house was next door to the synagogue. This Gaius was evidently a man of means since he provided hospitality not only to Paul but also to the 'whole church.' It appears that Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans in Gaius' home.

b) Erastus (16:23b)

Erastus, the city treasurer...

'Erastus' may be the same Erastus whom Paul sends from Ephesus to Macedonia during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:21-22; cp. also 2 Tim. 4:20). But the identification is complicated by the existence of an inscription in Corinth that names an Erastus as 'aedile' of the city. The term that Paul uses here to describe Erastus, *oikonomos*, identifies him as a financial office in the city government (e.g., 'treasurer'); and it is not clear whether this title would be equivalent to 'aedile.' The aedile was appointed for one year and was responsible for the city streets and buildings, and for certain finances. If these terms are not equivalent, it is still possible that Erastus, having served as 'treasurer,' was promoted to aedile at a later date. On the whole, the identification of Paul's Erastus with the Erastus named in this inscription is probable.

Another significant person to send greetings to Rome was Erastus, who Paul refers to as the 'treasurer' (*oikonomos*) of Corinth. Some uncertainty surrounds the precise office Erastus held, though he was certainly a well-known city leader. An inscription bearing the name Erastus, 'public works commissioner' was discovered near the theater in Corinth. It is not certain if this is the same 'Erastus.'

'Erastus' was 'the city treasurer' of Corinth and therefore a man of prominence and high political office. Because his was such a common name, and because there is no clear New Testament evidence to suggest otherwise, this 'Erastus' probably was not the man mentioned in Acts 19:22) or in 2 Tim. 4:20.

c) Quartus (16:23c)

...and our brother Quartus, greet you.

'Quartus' is not found elsewhere in the NT; Paul simply identifies him as a fellow believer.

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‘Quartus’ was the last of Paul’s companions in whose behalf he sent greetings. He is identified only as ‘the brother,’ which could mean he was the biological brother of Erastus, who has just been mentioned, or, more probably, simply that he was ‘a brother’ in Christ.

Finally, Paul sends greetings from Quartus, ‘the brother’ Christian who is, however, otherwise unknown. These ‘greetings’ from Corinth, like those exhortations to ‘greet’ Roman Christians, tell their own story of the affection between these believers, distant geographically from one another though they were.

5. Second Grace (16:24)

²⁴*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

A number of manuscripts add after v. 23 a grace wish, and the KJV therefore has as v. 24: ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.’ But this verse is omitted in the earliest and most important manuscripts and is clearly a later addition to the text.

As indicated by brackets in the *New American Standard Bible*, Paul’s third short benediction (cp. 15:33; 16:20b) is not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the book of Romans. That is understandable, because these closing three verses form a longer, more explicitly benediction, to which verse 24 adds nothing and seems a bit out of place. But the sentiment is fully consistent with the rest of Paul’s gracious epilogue. ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.’

C. Final Doxology (Romans 16:25-27)

Paul ends his majestic letter to the Romans with a doxology in praise of the God who has in the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the climax of salvation history. Paul deliberately echoes in these verses the language and themes of the letter, and in particularly its opening section. Prominent here again is the theme of the revelation of the gospel as the pinnacle of salvation history and as a message of universal applicability. Paul ends as he began. Paul clearly intends to stimulate the Roman Christians’ praise of God by reminding them of what he has told them of God’s wonderful plan for their salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now comes the end. Paul takes the pen in his own hand and writes the last few lines. We know this because in 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18 he mentions that he does this in every letter, presumably so the readers will know the letter is not a forgery. What did he write? Another doxology of course, the longest of all his doxologies, and one of the most beautiful. I have entitled it, ‘The End Is Praise.’ Logically, there is no other way he could have ended the monumental argument of Romans, and there is no other way we can properly end its study. Paul’s final praise is a model for all times, a model for our song in the Lord.

The book of Romans ends with a beautiful doxology, praising God for what He has done through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is a remarkable relationship between the last three verses of Romans and the first eleven. Paul’s closing doxology in Romans is unique, in that, in his praise of the Lord, he recapitulates major themes of the epistle. Perhaps taking the pen from Tertius (v. 22), the apostle touches on the gospel that establishes men (v. 25a), the gospel that proclaims Jesus Christ (v. 25b), and the gospel that reveals God’s mystery (vv. 25c-26).

These verses have a liturgical ring to them and form a fitting conclusion to the letter. Paul uses a repeated threefold structure to enhance the liturgical tone of the doxology: note ‘gospel,’

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‘preaching,’ and ‘revelation’ in v. 25b, the three participial modifiers of revelation – ‘kept secret,’ ‘manifested,’ and ‘made known.’ Perhaps it is the very complexity of this arrangement that lands Paul in syntactical difficulties; for vv. 25-27 are one long incomplete sentence.

1. Textual Difficulties with the Doxology

This concluding doxology has a checkered textual history. Uncertainty about its placement (after 14:23; after 15:33; after both) has raised doubts in the minds of critics about its authenticity. But far more serious are the doubts raised by its contents. The language of these verses is said to be un-Pauline, with wording that is foreign to him and that is typical of a later period. Finally, Paul never elsewhere concludes a letter with a doxology. For these reasons, and others, a large majority of recent scholars think that the doxology is a post-Pauline addition to Romans, perhaps originating at the time when Marcion allegedly butchered the text of the letter.

The arguments for the exclusion of this doxology are therefore formidable; but there are arguments on the other side as well. First the manuscript support for including the doxology at this point is strong. Second, the language of the doxology demonstrates remarkable parallels to the language of Romans, and especially to its opening. These parallels are usually attributed to the later redactor, who sought to fit the doxology to the style of the letter. But they could also point to Paul’s own authorship. Third, the differences from Paul’s own style are largely eliminated if we maintain the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians. Fourth, it does not seem credible that Paul would end his letter with ‘Quartus, the fellow Christian.’ Thus the many older scholars who maintained the authenticity of the doxology are joined by a number of modern supporters as well.

A decision is very difficult; but we are slightly inclined to include the doxology as part of Paul’s original letter. The differing placements of the doxology, and its omission in some manuscripts, can be accounted for by the textual disruptions of the last chapters of the letter. The language and style are not un-Pauline. The biggest obstacle in the way of accepting the doxology is Paul’s general practice of adding doxologies in the midst of his letters. But the ending of Romans shows enough differences from the other letters that this is not that large of a problem.

2. Threefold Description of the Message (16:25a)

a) *God’s Work of Strengthening (16:25a)*

²⁵*Now to him who is able to strengthen you...*

Paul begins, not by naming God, but by characterizing Him as the one who ‘is able to strengthen you.’ What Paul hopes to do when he comes to Rome (1:11) he acknowledges to be possible only through divine aid.

First of all, Paul praises God for the gospel that establishes men. God ‘is able,’ that is, has sufficient power, ‘to establish’ those who trust in Him ‘according to’ the true ‘gospel’ that Paul, and every true preacher and teacher, have clearly set forth. *Stērizō* (‘to establish’) means to make firm and stable, to make fast. In this context, it refers to being mentally settled, firmly rooted in the truth of the gospel. Through the gospel, God ‘is able to establish’ the minds and hearts of believers in the truth, to settle us, ground us, and make us firm in Him. No one but a Christian can be certain about God, certain about His truth, certain about His standards of righteousness, certain about His love and care, or certain about being with Him throughout eternity.

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Paul gives the final benediction: ‘Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel.’ He frequently uses the term *edification*. It is a term borrowed from the building industry. We are not to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. As we grow in grace, as our sanctification proceeds, we are to be edified and built up to the point at which our faith, our character, and our devotion are established (Eph. 4:11-13).

The word ‘strengthen’ can also be translated ‘establish.’ We see the idea more fully when we understand that the root from which the word ‘establish’ (*stērixai*) comes from is the word ‘prop,’ as with a prop that holds something up. God is able to make us stand, thereby establishing us. The same Greek word is used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, which says God is able to ‘establish’ our hearts in blameless holiness. The thrust here at the end of the great theological foundation of Romans is that spiritually God is able to make us stand strong and steadfast. He props His people up so they will not fall.

In the precise context of our passage God is ‘powerful’ to ‘strengthen’ the Roman Christians. This picks up exactly Paul’s ‘longing’ expressed at the beginning of the letter, that by his coming he may impart some spiritual gift to ‘strengthen’ them (1:11). At the same time, the immediate context spoke of dangerous ‘deceivers’ and ‘dividers’ of the Roman Christians. God will ‘strengthen’ the people in the face of these problems. In everyday use this word (*sterizō*) meant ‘securing firmly,’ for example, a loose floorboard. Luke used this word for Jesus when He ‘fixed His face’ to go towards Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). The writers of the New Testament repeatedly pray for and encourage the ‘strengthening’ of individuals and churches in their faith in the face of adversity, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 3:2, James 5:8, 1 Peter 5:10, and Revelation 3:2.

b) God’s Word That Strengthens (16:25b-c)

(1) Gospel and Preaching (16:25b)

...according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...

In referring to ‘my gospel,’ Paul was not speaking of his own personal view of the gospel. His gospel was the same as Peter’s gospel, John’s gospel, and the gospel preached by the other true apostles and teachers—the divinely-revealed gospel of Jesus Christ. The only gospel of God that establishes men is the gospel that proclaims Jesus Christ. The major theme of Romans, like the major theme of all Scripture, is Jesus Christ. ‘The preaching of Jesus Christ’ was Paul’s supreme life commitment (1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2 Cor. 4:5-6).

Paul’s point is that the ‘gospel’ is the source of the strengthening. ‘Preaching (*kerygma*) of Jesus Christ,’ which we can paraphrase ‘preaching about Jesus Christ,’ is a further definition of ‘my gospel.’

As Paul further expresses his thought in verse 25, he tells us how God establishes us: ‘according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.’ We were established initially through Jesus Christ, and we are maintained continually by Him. Jesus is the exegesis, the explanation of the Godhead. Therefore, our knowledge of Jesus is the key to knowing God and to standing or being established. The key to standing is making Jesus the center of everything. Then we will be able to stand, for it is Jesus who establishes us.

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How does Paul know that God ‘strengthens’ His people’? It is, he says ‘according to my gospel (*euangelion*) and my proclamation (*kērypsgma*). The ‘gospel’ that Paul *proclaimed* was, as he wrote earlier, ‘the power of God for salvation to all who believe’ (1:16).

In this benediction, the apostle reminds the people at Rome about who is able to make our establishment happen: ‘the preaching of Jesus Christ.’ We are to be established according to Paul’s gospel. Without the righteousness of Christ, you and I are finished. Without imputation there is no justification, and without justification by faith alone, there is no gospel. The only gospel is Paul’s gospel, the one he was authorized and set apart to proclaim. Being established in the Christian life is to be established according to that gospel. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is easy to get from an intellectual standpoint, but to get it in the bloodstream takes a lifetime.

(2) Revelation of the Mystery (16:25c)

...according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ...

And ‘according to the revelation’ could be a third, roughly parallel, description of the same message. But it is better to subordinate this phrase to ‘preaching’ or to ‘gospel and preaching,’ or perhaps best, ‘gospel’: the gospel is ‘in accordance with,’ ‘based on,’ the revelation of the mystery. Paul has used ‘mystery’ in 11:25, but its application here to the basic content of Paul’s gospel and preaching is closer to Paul’s use of the term in passages such as 1 Cor. 2:7, Eph. 3:3-9, and Col. 1:26-27.

The second aspect of our being established is given in the last half of verse 25. We are established when and as the ancient mystery is opened to us. How is this so? Part of the answer lies in the word ‘mystery’ (*mystērion*), which in the New Testament does not mean mysterious (as the English word suggests) but rather *a secret that was once kept dark but is now revealed*. Here in Romans a great and ancient secret has been thrown wide open to believers by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the mystery of Jesus, which Paul calls the ‘mystery, which is Christ’ in Colossians 1:27. The *mystērion* has been opened to us. We cannot understand everything, for even in eternity the wonder of it will continue to unfold. Yet now, in time, we understand what was in ages past darkly veiled.

‘Mystery’ (*mystērion*) is one of Paul’s keywords, though it is not easy for us modern readers to understand its meaning. As used by Paul, it meant ‘a plan of God that was previously hidden but which is now revealed.’ That ‘hidden plan’ was that ‘all the Gentiles’ were to be summoned to obey the Word of God by believing in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The gospel that establishes us and that proclaims Jesus Christ also reveals God’s ‘divine mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past.’ This ‘mystery’ (*mystērion*) does not carry the connotation that word has in modern English, as used, for example, of a mystery novel. In the New Testament, it refers to something hidden in former times but now made known. Specifically, it refers to a part of God’s truth that was not revealed, or was only partially revealed, in the Old Testament. The most common mystery spoken of in the New Testament relates to God’s providing salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews (Eph. 3:3-5). Specifically, the mystery is ‘that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’ (Eph. 3:6; cp. v.9). In other words, God’s ultimate plan of redemption has always included the Gentiles in every way as much as the Jews, His specially chosen people under the Old Covenant.

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Through Jesus Christ, believing Gentiles are as fully saved, as fully the children of God, and as fully citizens of His divine kingdom as are believing Jews.

The rest of v. 25 and all of v. 26 are taken up with a threefold description of this ‘mystery.’ First, Paul says, it was ‘kept secret (*σείσημενον, sesigēmenou* from the verb ‘be silent’) for long ages (*χρονίος αἰώνιος, chronios aiōniois*).’ Here Paul reflects a motif typical in apocalyptic: the hiddenness of God’s plan and purposes. This hiddenness, as Paul will make clear in v. 26, does not mean that one could have no knowledge of the content of the mystery. What it means, rather, is that one could not fully understand it nor – and this is the special emphasis – experience it.

3. Twofold Description of the Mystery (16:26)

a) Now Disclosed (16:26a)

²⁶ *...but has now been disclosed...*

Following a typical NT salvation-historical scheme, Paul indicates that the mystery that has been ‘kept secret’ has ‘now been manifested (*φανερωω, phaneroō*).’

God’s decisive hour has struck, signaled by the critical word, ‘now’ (*nun*). This ‘revelation’ of the ‘long-hidden mystery’ has now occurred, but in a two-stage process the first involving Christ alone and the second involving Christ working through His apostle, Paul. In this two-step program God brought salvation to His historic people the Jews through His ‘minister’ Christ and then to the Gentiles through ‘Christ’s minister’ Paul. By God’s gracious calling of him, Paul saw himself as having a special place in that plan, an extension of Christ’s own ministry, no less (15:18). Thus Paul enjoyed a special revelation of the long-hidden ‘mystery’ of God mercifully to gather in the peoples of the Gentiles into His kingdom (see 11:11-15; cp. Eph. 3:1-9).

b) Been Made Known (16:26b-c)

The four prepositional modifiers in this verse all go with the third participle Paul uses to describe the mystery, ‘made known’ at the end of the verse.

(1) The Means (16:26b)

...and through the prophetic writings has been made known ... according to the command of the eternal God...

The first of the prepositional phrases describes the means through which the mystery was made known: ‘through the prophetic writings.’ Since we would expect the gospel, or the NT, to be the source of this revelation, some scholars think Paul may allude here to the apostles’ writings or to the Scriptures as a whole. But Paul has made sufficiently clear that the mystery of God’s work in Christ, while not experienced or understood in its fullness in the OT period, was nevertheless ‘testified to’ by the TO (cp. esp. 1:2; 3:21). ‘Prophetic writings’ will therefore refer to the OT.

The mystery that now is manifested has been predicted in veiled words in the Old Testament (e.g., Is. 53:11; Jer. 31:31, 33; Ez. 11:19). Jews had always thought that such predictions, whatever they may fully have meant, applied only to them, the chosen race of God. Even to God’s inspired prophets under the Old Covenant, the full meaning of their prophecies was a mystery.

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‘According to the command of the eternal God’ stresses that it was God’s own determination to make known the mystery at the time that He did. The ‘command’ is not any specific historical divine command, but refers to the expression of God’s will.

(2) The Purpose (16:26c)

...to all nations ... to bring about the obedience of faith—

The last two prepositional phrases indicate the purpose of the mystery being ‘made known’ – that people might come to believe and obey the gospel – and the object of its being made known – ‘to all the nations.’ Paul returns for the last time to a theme with which the letter opened (1:5) and to which he has continually returned: the universal applicability of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we compare the final three verses of Romans with the first six verses in the letter we see that common to both passages is Paul’s discussion of the gospel. The gospel that was prophesied (as ‘a mystery’) in the prophetic writings is now made known in the proclamation of Jesus Christ. By it God summons the Gentiles to obey it by believing in Christ. These common elements are not accidental, but deliberate. They intentionally ‘round off’ the letter, by a rhetorical device called an *inclusio*. Paul’s point is to enclose the whole letter with these references to the gospel at the beginning and the end.

4. **Single Focus on Praise (16:27)**

²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen

Paul finally returns to the construction with which he opened his doxology, identifying now the ‘one who is able’ as ‘the only wise (*μονω σοφω*, *monō sophō*) God.’ God’s wisdom, as in 11:33, has to do with His ‘wise’ plan for salvation history, now understood, lived out, and given thanks for by the saints. This plan, of course, culminated in a person and His work: God’s Son, Jesus Christ (cp. 1:3-4). It is therefore appropriate that the saints give glory to God ‘through Jesus Christ.’

Paul crowns this marvelous letter with praise ‘to the only wise God,’ the God of Jews and of Gentiles, the God of all creation. Perhaps he calls attention here to God’s wisdom in order to emphasize that only an infinitely wise mind could have designed and accomplished such a plan of redemption. It was ‘through Jesus Christ’ that God supremely revealed not only His great grace but also His great wisdom. To Him, therefore, ‘be the glory forever. Amen.’

Paul fittingly ends Romans with praise to God for His wisdom. Our God is the *only* God. There is none but Him. He is incomprehensible. Our God is also the *only wise* God. In affirming this, I am reminded that whatever God is He is infinitely. Therefore, God is infinite wisdom. Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by perfect means. This our God does without limit. In His wisdom He has made it possible for those who were once bound to earth by their own sinful depravity to be loosed from their sins and to know the throne of God as eternal home. He has made it possible for men who were made lower than the angels to rise higher than the angels. He has made it possible for us to become His own sons and daughters. For all this there can only be doxology—‘to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.’

In every generation all over the world, the gospel that Paul lovingly, jealously, passionately sets forth here in his magnum opus is obscured, attacked, and brought almost to ruin, but Paul’s prayer—that people would be established in that gospel forever—has borne witness by the

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history of the church. Despite all heresies, persecutions, and distortions, the gospel that was revealed here continues to be manifested by the wisdom, power, and establishment of God, who alone receives the glory. The final word of the apostle's letter comes from the Hebrew *aman*, which is translated 'truth.' That word is 'Amen.' So all God's people say, 'Amen.'

For next time: End of Bible Study. Summer break!