

WARM-UP

- Have you ever been entrusted to lead a project? How did you keep the team united?
- Tell about a time you accomplished something but didn't get the credit for it. How did you feel?
- Name a person you know who works wholeheartedly, without asking for recognition. Tell us about him or her.

WORD *¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that 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 many and of myself as well. **ROMANS 16:1,2***

(Read also **ROMANS 16.**)

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul commended a number of people to the church in Rome, and gave some last warnings. The chapter can be quickly read as it seems to be simply a long list of names, like reading the end credits of a movie. But in this chapter, we can learn three things about keeping unity in the church.

1 | Honor the unsung heroes of the church.

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that 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 many and of myself as well.

ROMANS 16:1,2

Every person that Paul named had stories that he mentioned briefly. He asked the church in Rome to greet and welcome them, as they had done so much. These are people that we don't read about anywhere else in the Bible, and yet from the description, they had given their greatest efforts and even risked their lives for God, the gospel, and the apostles. This sounds a lot like the church community today. There are so many who do so much behind the scenes, who are never seen on stage, and whose names are never flashed on screen. God will indeed reward each person for what they have done, but we can still follow Paul's example and honor and acknowledge their work. What does Philippians 2:3 say about how we must treat others?

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2 | Watch out for those who cause division.

*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. **ROMANS 16:17***

Paul sent a warning as well to the church in Rome: to avoid those who would cause division in the church. There were those among them who caused dissension by creating religious requirements contrary to sound doctrine. These then became obstacles to unity with others. Paul warned

the church in Rome that although they were known for their obedience, he still wanted them to be alert; to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil (Romans 16:19). He reminded them to hope in God, who would crush Satan. In the same way, we are all prone to deception. However, we can be alert to the schemes of the enemy (2 Corinthians 2:11) and hope in God, who has won the ultimate victory over death. How do you keep alert in the Spirit?

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3 | Rely on the grace of God that maintains unity in the Church.

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

Over and above avoiding divisive people in the church and being alert to the devil's schemes, how can we maintain unity in the church? Only God can truly keep us united as one body, the body of Christ. It is God's grace in and through us that will bring peace and destroy the division caused by the enemy. How have you witnessed God's power to overcome divisiveness and uphold unity? What should our response to arguments, gossip, or competition within the church community be?

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APPLICATION

- Name two people you are thankful for. Commit to send them a message to thank them today.
- We must be alert to the schemes of the enemy. What is one habit you can develop that will help you grow more sensitive to the Spirit?
- Think of family members and friends who need to experience the power of God that sustains unity. Pray for them to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior and commit to preach the gospel to them.

PRAYER

- Thank God for the unity that He brings to His Church. Thank Him for the spiritual family we are part of—our church community.
- Pray that you will be alert to any divisive schemes of the enemy. Pray that you will not be deceived.
- Pray to be reminded daily that unity in the Church is only possible through God's grace. Pray for His strength to keep that unity.



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