

INTRODUCTION: A CONCLUDING WORD THAT ISN'T SMALL

Paul's letter to the Romans doesn't taper off with greetings to all of his friends and coworkers in ministry, nor does he tie up loose ends. Instead, he offers one last pastoral charge. Paul reminds the church that the gospel is **not human speculation but divine revelation**, and that the only fitting response to such a gift is *glory*.

If you have your bible, turn to Chapter 16 of Romans. Pew Bibles: 1126.

These are the words of God for the people of God (Praise Be to God).

EXEGESIS REVIEW:

Romans 16:17–20, “I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way...” (v. 17)

Paul's tone shifts here to remind us, almost parental-like, he is saying, “guard the church from division...” This, just after greeting dozens of friends and partners in the ministry, he now warns us: *There will be people who do not carry this same spirit. Beware of them.*

These people out there are not merely wrong; they are dangerous. Paul names their tactics: flattery, smooth talk, and manipulation. Native Americans called these people forked-tongued. **John MacArthur** warns that such speech “plays on the pride and ego of others” rather than honoring Christ as Lord.¹

Yet Paul does not call us to be paranoid; he calls for wisdom and holiness. “*Be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.*” (v. 19). Now think about that... This is not a naive innocence, but the kind **Carole Dale Spencer** associates with the “devout life” in holiness—marked by discernment, peace, and purity in relationships.²

In today's polarized age, where ideology often trumps truth, the church must be vigilant. Remember: Division is not always loud; sometimes it whispers.

In Romans 16:21–23...

Paul now names several co-workers: Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Tertius, the scribe, even inserts a greeting of his own.

These verses show us the gospel in action, forming a contrast: **true gospel work happens in community, in the open, with integrity**. There is no manipulation here... only affection and mutual trust. **Thomas R. Kelly** once said, “The deepest fellowship lies in the things not said but known in shared Light.”³

¹ John MacArthur, *Romans 9–16* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994), 373.

² Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 117–119.

³ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 39.

(Pause) Follow Paul's example: Surround yourself with people whose lives *reflect* the gospel. These are your theological companions, not just those who agree with you here (intellectually), but those who stand under the same Light.

Insight from Paul N. Anderson:

We also see this in the theology of the Apostle John; in the Gospel of John (Johannine theology), truth is not merely something to be *stated*: it is something to be *lived, shared, and embodied* in relationship. Biblical scholar **Paul N. Anderson** writes that the **truth of the Spirit** is not just **propositional** (a list of statements or doctrines to agree with), it is **relational and communal**. The Spirit guides believers into truth not only by revealing ideas, but by forming and sustaining **Spirit-led communities** of mutual love, trust, and discernment.

In John 16:13, Jesus tells the disciples, “*When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*” Anderson notes that this “guidance” happens not just intellectually, but **through relationships formed and held together by the Spirit**. In contrast to the isolating and manipulative speech of deceivers (Romans 16:18), true gospel fellowship — like the kind Paul describes with Timothy and others — reflects this **Johannine pattern**: people walking in the Light together, discerning the truth as a **shared experience of divine presence**.

This connects powerfully with **Friends’ theology**, where discernment is not merely about arriving at correct conclusions, but about **coming to unity in the Spirit**. Truth is revealed in **the context of worshiping, waiting, and loving communities**, not just in private study or persuasive speech.⁴

Romans 16:25–26, “*Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel... the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed...*”

This is not a vague spiritual message. Paul points to the gospel as **mystery revealed**—a truth once veiled, now proclaimed through Christ and the prophets.

N.T. Wright explains that for Paul, “mystery” does not mean unknowable but rather *long-concealed and now unveiled*.⁵ The gospel is not advice; it is revelation. And it is **not invented**—it is *disclosed*.

The Friends Faith (Orthodox Quakerism), at its best, receives the Light of Christ as not merely experiential, but **revelatory**. The Inner Light does not contradict Scripture; it fulfills its voice inwardly and personally.

Do you see your life as shaped by a divine mystery now revealed? Or have you settled into routine, forgetting the awe of being known and called by God (Himself)?

THE DOXOLOGY:

Romans 16:27, “*To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*”

⁴ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 214–216.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two* (London: SPCK, 2004), 140–142.

Paul concludes not with a benediction, but a doxology. He invites us not into explanation, but into **exaltation**.

Leonard Sweet argues that the church’s credibility rests not in its argumentation but in its **story**—its worshipful embodiment of the gospel.⁶ Our final word must not be debate but delight. Not speculation, but **glory**.

In the silence of an early Quaker meetings, sometimes no one spoke at all, for an hour or maybe more... But if worship rises in the soul, no sermon is needed. The final word has been said—by the Spirit.

TAKE AWAY:

Those who understand the value of **Expectant Worship** often find themselves longing for more silence, not less. They recognize that in this spacious silence, this space we hold together, something profound is happening — not empty waiting, but holy listening. Yet for those unfamiliar with this practice, the silence may feel awkward or unproductive. They may wonder if we’ve forgotten the next part of the service. So let me take a moment to explain what’s really happening during this time of **Open Worship**.

Our entire service is intentionally structured to lead toward this moment — this sacred communion with the **Holy Spirit**. It unfolds in three movements: **preparation, adoration, and communion**.

We begin with a **Call to Worship**, which functions as a time of preparation. This includes an opening prayer, church announcements, space for sharing joys and concerns, and a prayer over the offering. It centers us in community and orients our hearts toward God.

From there, we move into a time of **Worship and Praise** — this is a movement of adoration. Through song, scripture reading, and often a brief gospel message, we express our love and reverence for the Lord. These outward expressions help awaken our inward attentiveness.

Then comes the third and most inward part of our gathering: **Expectant Worship**. The bulletin may call this our “Closing,” but in truth, it is our **Call to Action**. This time is not the end of worship but its summit. Here we are invited to **center down** — a Quaker phrase meaning to still our bodies, quiet our minds, and become aware of God’s presence within and around us. We wait in silence, not passively, but **actively expecting** the Spirit to speak, to comfort, to convict, or to lead.

This silence is not a void; it is a vessel. It creates space for us to listen deeply — both individually and corporately. Some may feel prompted to share a word, a prayer, or a message aloud. This is called **vocal ministry**, and it arises only when led by the Spirit, not by impulse or obligation. Others may remain silent the entire time, but even that silence can be full of

⁶ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2015), 104.

awesome worship. As **Thomas R. Kelly** writes, “Deep within us all, there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center.”⁷

In this centered, expectant posture, we come into contact with our **Inner Light** — Christ’s presence within us — and with the Spirit’s call upon our lives. We do not simply reflect on what we’ve heard; we *respond*. Expectant Worship is our moment of communion, but also our moment of commissioning. Here, we align ourselves with the will of Christ, and we listen for how to live that out.

And so, as the meeting draws to a close, we do not rush out — we rise **sent**. Our response to the faith and love of Jesus is this: to go and **be the Light** in our communities. To carry what we have heard inwardly into the world outwardly. To live as people who have *seen*, and who long for others to see as well.

CONCLUSION:

Living in the Arc of Grace

Romans began with this promise: “*The gospel... was promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*” (Romans 1:2)

And now it ends here: “*Now to him... be glory forever,*” Paul says.

The arc bends from **promise** to **praise**, from **faith revealed** to **faith obeyed**, from **truth proclaimed** to **truth worshiped**.

Friends, this is our calling: To live lives grounded in gospel clarity, committed to relational holiness, and lifted in praise to the only wise God.

Paul’s final words in Romans look inward, prioritizing spiritual posture over intellectualism. After extensive theological reflection, he ends not in speculation, but in revelation — and therefore, in worship.

As we take a few moments in Open Worship, think about this in your Spiritual Formation:

- Are you guarding your heart and your community from deceptive voices?
- Are you cultivating fellowship that reflects gospel integrity?
- Are you living with the awe of a mystery now revealed?
- Does your day end in worship?

⁷ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 3. This quote appears in the opening essay, titled *The Light Within*.

NOTES AND TERMS:

- **Expectant Worship:** A time of communal silence in which Friends wait on the Spirit.
- **Centering:** The act of quieting oneself to become more aware of God's presence.
- **Inner Light:** The experiential presence of Christ within every person.
- **Vocal Ministry:** Spirit-led speaking during open worship, not pre-planned but prompted.

Section	Theme	Description
vv. 17–20	Warning Against Division	Pastoral instruction to protect the unity and doctrinal integrity of the church.
vv. 21–23	Communal Commendation	Personal greetings and endorsements affirming trustworthy coworkers in contrast to deceivers.
vv. 25–27	Theological Doxology	A sweeping summary of the gospel's divine origin and cosmic purpose, ending in praise.