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To appreciate what Paul is unveiling in the book of Romans, it is necessary to understand the background, atmosphere, and context in which he was speaking. In order to fully grasp what kind of environment Paul was in, we need to consider some more matters related to the background. He was addressing all the saints in the city of Rome, irrespective of their background culturally, religiously, or nationally; and he was seeking for them to be established according to the revelation of the mystery of Christ.

The timing of Paul's letter to the Romans

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, he was in the city of Corinth with a number of brothers from the church there (Rom. 16:21-23). The letter was written on the eve of his trip to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25), where he would carry an offering that he had spent years collecting from the saints in all the Gentile churches (Rom. 15:26-28). Apparently the offering had been delayed because some of the saints had not felt happy to give (2 Cor. 9:7).

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So Paul had written two letters to the Corinthians, encouraging them to keep their promise to give to the saints in Jerusalem. Actually, Paul had been boasting about the Corinthians' willingness and eagerness to give, but he still needed to prod them a little (2 Cor. 9:2-5). While in Corinth he felt satisfied with the amount collected. No doubt, he would not have wanted to go to Jerusalem if there were only a small collection from all the Gentile churches. Now the collection was sufficient, the timing was right, and he was about to embark on his trip to Jerusalem.

What mattered to Paul at this time was not merely the taking of an offering to Jerusalem, but even more, what the offering represented. It represented the oneness of the churches in the fellowship of the one Body. It was something coming from the Gentile churches to the churches in Judea, which were predominantly Jewish (Rom. 15:26-27). It represented a coming together in something practical, which Paul hoped would build a bridge of fellowship between the Gentile and Judean churches (Rom. 15:31). The offering was also a grace and a fellowship (2 Cor. 8:4). Ultimately, the offering represented a factor that would evoke thanksgiving on the part of the Judean churches for the genuineness of the Gentile churches in their response to the gospel (2 Cor. 9:12-13).

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With the above background in mind, it is clear that what was on Paul's heart at the time of the writing of the letter to the Romans was the oneness of the Body as the mystery of Christ, that is, the practical establishing of Jew and Gentile in one church. In going to Jerusalem Paul's burden was on a universal scale; in writing to Rome the same burden was on a local scale.

The tension between the churches

In reconstructing the atmosphere in the New Testament concerning the relationship between the churches, we realize that the situation was not that simple. In the fellowship of the churches, there was evident tension existing between the Jew and the Gentile. There was surely a battle over the churches being established according to the revelation of the mystery. Paul speaks in detail of the presence of this battle in the passage on spiritual warfare in Ephesians chapter 6. There the battle had to do with having boldness for uttering "the mystery of the gospel" (v. 19). Again, this refers to what Paul defined as "the mystery of Christ" in Ephesians chapter 3 — the one Body made up of Jew and Gentile.

In Galatians chapter 2 the incident in Antioch between Peter and Paul, concerning the table fellowship

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with Jews and Gentiles, tells us that the atmosphere among the churches was not that peaceful. Just consider how Peter withdrew and separated himself from fellowship with the Gentile saints because of fearing “those who were of the circumcision” (v. 12). This was even after he had had such a powerful revelation from God about receiving the Gentile saints, with a confirming experience in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). His fear indicates that there was a strong tension in the atmosphere of the churches.

This tension was present when Paul wrote his letter from Corinth to the saints in Rome as he was about to depart for Jerusalem. The kind of prayers that Paul beseeched the Roman believers to pray indicates there was warfare related to his trip. In Romans 15:30-32 Paul says, ³⁰ “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who [are disobedient], and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.” These verses indicate how charged the atmosphere was, due to the strong feelings among many concerning a gift

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from Gentile churches going into Jewish territory, especially when the apostle to the Gentiles was bringing the gift.

The tension reaches its peak in Acts 21, when Paul arrives in Jerusalem to be received by the church there and to present the gift from the Gentile churches. In verses 20b-24 the elders relate the situation to Paul: ^{20b} “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ²¹ but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. ²² What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. ²³ Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. ²⁴ Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.”

The above verses reveal how explosive the atmosphere was in Jerusalem. The strong feelings and zeal for the law even among the believing Jews would not allow

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a church composed of Jew and Gentile to come forth in a simple way. Of course, the problem was compounded due to the hatred existing toward Paul. We know that he was well aware of the problem because of the way he spoke to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:22-23: ²² “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”

On Paul’s journey to Jerusalem, many prophets along the way warned him not to go there (Acts 21:8-14). But Paul was under the vision of the church — that Christ died and reconciled Jew and Gentile in one Body to God. This was the very mystery of Christ to be realized practically in the church. It had everything to do with the saints receiving one another in the reality of a common salvation. Seeking to see the revelation of this mystery worked out, Paul found himself in the middle of a riotous mob. He had acted on the advice of the elders of the church in Jerusalem to take a vow. But near the end of the week, while carrying out the vow, Paul was seen in the temple by some from Asia who knew him. At that point these Jews from Asia stirred up the whole crowd and caused the entire city of Jerusalem to be disturbed and in confusion (Acts 21:27-31). They wanted to do away with Paul. This

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incident led to Paul's imprisonment. Such a sequence of events illustrates one major fact about the New Testament period — there was tension and a tremendous battle over the establishing of the one Body of Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.

What is an established church?

The main burden of the letter to the Romans is the establishing of the church. Now we need to ask, what does it mean for a church to be established? Yes, there were Christians in Rome. Yes, they had faith in Christ and loved all the saints. Yes, there were already several home gatherings in the city. Yes, they were touching the Spirit. But the question is, at the time Paul wrote to them, was there an established church?

For a church to be considered an established church, it must be according to something. Romans 16:25 makes this clear: “Now to Him who is able to establish you *according to* my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to* the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.” In his *Expanded Translation of the New Testament*, Kenneth S. Wuest translates the middle part of verse 25 as follows: “according to my gospel, even the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ.”

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The word “even” captures the appositional relationship between the two phrases. Thus, “my gospel” *is* “the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ.” Paul’s gospel is not one thing, and the proclamation of Jesus Christ another. They are the same. Thus, Paul is saying the same thing two different ways. “My gospel” is equivalent to “the proclamation of Jesus Christ.”

For the establishing of the church to take place, the proclamation of Jesus Christ must be strictly “according to the revelation of the mystery.” The “according to” refers to a standard by which Christ is proclaimed. This means that God uses a certain standard of preaching — “the revelation of the mystery” — as the conveyor for His power to be exerted to establish the saints. His power works only within that standard of preaching. God’s power operates to establish the saints only through the unveiling of Christ in relation to what He did to produce the one new man and one Body on the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). The one Body is the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:1-6). This means that the establishing of the church is related to all the saints receiving one another in one Body, as that Body is expressed in the practical church life.

Following Romans 16:25, where Paul touches such a high matter as the Body being the mystery kept silent since the world began, we then read in verse 26, “but now

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has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the [command] of the [eternal] God, for [the] obedience [of] faith.” Once this revelation is disclosed by God in the Scriptures, there is only one thing left for all the nations to do — respond with “the obedience of faith.” The phrase “the obedience of faith” means that no one has a choice in this matter. We simply hear, and then we respond to what we hear. Our response to what we hear is called faith (Rom. 10:17).

The word “obedience” added to “faith” indicates that faith is in the realm where we have no choice. We are under a revelation that comes directly from a command of the eternal God and that opens to us His heart, His thought — the mystery that was kept secret since the world began. Thus, the establishing is God’s operating in us by His word and revelation to produce a response in us to live a church life on the earth. This church life is made up of all the saints who stand together locally, universally, and practically. Our standing together is simply our experiencing Christ with one another, receiving one another just as Christ received us to the glory of God. This is the meaning of Paul’s burden to see the saints established “according to the revelation of the mystery.”

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Established by mutual receiving

With the background from Romans 16:25-26 on the meaning of being established, let us see how Paul used this same term “established” in Romans 1:11-12: ¹¹ “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established — ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” Notice the phrase “that is,” which connects verses 11 and 12. This phrase is there for the purpose of leading into a more precise definition of being established in verse 12.

When we ourselves are writing, we may want to restate a point to make it clearer, so we say, “that is,” and proceed to make the same point in another way. It is similar in the Greek language. The idiomatic phrase “that is” (τοῦτο δέ ἐστιν) is used to express something in apposition. It helps to clarify things. Thus, when Paul says, “so that you may be established,” and adds, “that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me,” he conveys the thought that being established has to do with being encouraged by the mutual faith of the saints. The receiving of one another in the mutual fellowship of each other’s faith is the

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primary sense of “established” in verse 11. A church is established when there is a mutual receiving and sharing of the faith of the saints in the context of the new man, the one Body of Christ.

The mutual faith is also the “common faith” (Titus 1:4). All believers have this faith in common with one another. With our common faith we partake together of our common salvation (Jude 3). When saints in any locality stand together on the basis of their common salvation and receive one another just as Christ received them, that is the genuine establishing. This is what is revealed in the book of Romans.

However, we may tend to think that an “established church” is a church in which all the believers have been grounded in certain doctrines, or all are practicing the same things. Or we may even have a more superficial understanding. We may think that when a church building is constructed and we have hired a pastor and there are over 100 people attending the meetings, then we have an established church. Or perhaps we think that a denomination or religious institution that dates back for centuries is an established church. Some people, especially in Europe, consider all the state churches to be established churches. But according to Paul’s thought, none of these

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examples constitute an established church. In the biblical sense, an established church exists when the saints stand together in a common way in a locality and receive one another. This kind of receiving is awesome, because it is a mutual acknowledgment that God has received us all (Rom. 14:3). It is a receiving that respects the reality of the one Body in the Holy Spirit.

When there is an atmosphere where saints can grow up into Christ in all things (Eph. 4:15-16), where every man can be fully persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:5), where saints can trust in God's light when they are otherwise minded from the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:15), where the weak saints and the strong saints remain together despite differences (Rom. 15:1-2), where righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit prevail over issues (Rom. 14:17), *there* is the genuine receiving, and *there* is an established church according to the revelation of the mystery.

The biblical establishing of the church

If a worker for the Lord goes to any place to establish the church, he must keep himself under the heavenly vision that Paul was under concerning the church. It is presumptuous to link saints together according to our

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view, our ministry, our work, or our denomination, though what we are “establishing” may be considered outwardly good by man’s standards.

The proper establishing of the church is an establishing based upon the common ground of the cross, where negatively we all stand as sinners, and positively we are all received by Christ. Thus, the real test of an established church is whether or not there is a genuine receiving among the saints. This receiving is more than a mere acknowledging of one another as part of the Body of Christ. It is taking one another to ourselves, receiving one another practically. Receiving is such a great matter in the New Testament because it reflects and expresses what took place on Calvary. This is why in the book of Romans the premium is put on *how* we receive one another.

Some believers may receive only those who speak in tongues. Of course, like Paul, we thank God for the gift of speaking in tongues, but it is not a factor for receiving believers (1 Cor. 14:18). It is a spiritual gift and has its proper place (1 Cor. 14). Other believers may stress certain teachings or practices. Again, we thank God for every teaching and practice revealed in the Bible, but they are not the factors for receiving one another. We cannot receive each other according to a unique emphasis, as good as it may be. Under the revelation of God’s Word,

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we see that an established church is one that receives the saints on the ground of what transpired on the cross (Rom. 15:7; Eph. 2:13-16).

When we understand that “the revelation of the mystery” in Romans 16:25 is all about the kind of relationships Christ established between us on the cross, we can see how this verse practically applies to us: “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, *according to the kind of receiving you have in your locality.*” Is our receiving the receiving of both Jew and Gentile in one Body? Peter did not pass the test in Antioch. This explains why Paul says that Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jews played the hypocrite (Gal. 2). Their actions and behavior among the saints were not the testimony of the church that is based upon the justification rooted in the cross of Christ.

Our standing is a standing on the major factors of what transpired in Christ’s death on the cross. What He did there determines how we relate to one another here. Do not insult the cross. Do not add to or take away from the blood. Do not base our receiving of one another upon anything but our common reconciliation and our common organic union with our Head. Do not insult Christ’s work by interjecting another thought, opinion, or way. Oh, brothers and sisters, one day millions of believers are

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going to shout on high, “It’s the blood! It’s the blood!” Hallelujah! We are all going to sing to the Lord, “You have redeemed us to God by Your blood!” (Rev. 5:9). Our theme will be “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (v. 12). All other chords will be drowned out by this one refrain about the Lamb.

The nature of receiving

If being established is equal to receiving one another, then we need to consider the nature of receiving in the New Testament. What kind of receiving is Paul speaking of in Romans 14 and 15? In Romans 14:1 he says, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not [for the purpose of passing judgment on his considerations].” As we have said before, the Greek word here for “receive” denotes a more intimate and personal receiving than other Greek words translated “receive” in the New Testament. It signifies receive, not only as that word is generally understood, but also in an intensified way. The root word for “receive” is prefixed with a preposition that means “toward.” Thus, it means to bring someone toward you in a warm and embracing way. Whenever this Greek word is used in the New Testament, it refers not to a

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distant, standoffish receiving, but to drawing someone toward you.

This same Greek word for receive is also used in Romans 15:7, where Paul says, “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received [you], to the glory of God.” Christ did not receive us at arm’s distance. He received us organically to become part of Himself. He joined us to Himself (1 Cor. 6:17). He does not receive us and then hold Himself back from us. Now, our receiving of one another is of the same nature as Christ’s receiving of us. It is in this receiving that the church is established according to the revelation of the mystery.

The dignity of receiving the saints

To appreciate the dignity involved in receiving the saints, we have to follow Paul’s feeling in every word he uses in Romans 16. In this way we can enter into the spirit of his writing. Reading the Bible is not just reading words on a page. Paul communicates the depths of what it means to receive one another when he speaks to the saints in Rome about receiving a sister from the church in Cenchrea. In Romans 16:1-2 he says, ¹ “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a

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manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a [protectress] of many and of myself also.” Phoebe was a very strong sister who had been a great supply and help to many, including Paul himself.

Paul says not only to receive Phoebe but to receive her “in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.” This indicates that receiving the saints is not a casual matter. The manner of our receiving should match the dignity of a saint — one for whom Christ died. This matter of receiving the saints touches our practice of the church life today. When we are under this revelation, we cannot lightly come to a church assembly and leave a few months later. But in the church world today, it is often this way. Believers come and go because there is a lack in the realization of what binds them together. If we as believers do not see Christ in us, with us, and between us, we will see only what we like and what we do not like. We will just be casually related to one another, without any revelation concerning our relationships in God.

Paul also uses the word “worthy” in Ephesians 4:1 when speaking of how the believer’s walk should correspond to his calling. He says, “I, therefore, the prisoner [in] the Lord, beseech you to [walk worthily] of the calling with which you were called.” In other words, as

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saints we should consider our calling — the dignity of it, the greatness of it, the honor of it — in such a way that our daily life and walk would match this calling and express the importance of it. The calling comes out of eternity past (2 Tim. 1:9). We are God’s masterpiece, “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10). We are His Body, the church, to manifest to the universe God’s manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10).

There is a sense of great value and worth concerning our calling and walk as believers. Paul knows that we must first see the magnitude of the calling with which we have been called. Then, based on that revelation he begs us to let our living be worthy of our calling. Let the way we live our daily life — the way we keep our home, the way we spend our time, the way we spend our money, the way we treat people, the way we react to people, the way we handle our problems — let our total walk be worthy of our calling. In other words, let your life match what God has chosen you for.

With this deep impression of what God has done over our lives, let us return again to Romans 16. In verse 2 Paul tells the Romans to “receive [Phoebe] . . . in a manner worthy of the saints.” Then he himself exemplifies this manner of receiving in the rest of the chapter. In Romans 16:3 he says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” Then he says in verse 5, “Greet

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my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia [unto] Christ.” In verse 7 he continues, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” As he names saint after saint, he elevates them as though they were dignitaries. You can sense the greatness of each one’s status in Christ.

Continuing in verse 8 Paul says, “Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.” And in verse 9 he says, “Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ.” In verse 10 he says, “Greet Apelles, approved in Christ.” Then in verse 12 he says, “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.” And in verse 13 he says, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” In all these verses you can feel Paul’s genuine receiving of the saints, his own taking them to himself in an intimate and personal way.

*The practical testimony of being
established with brothers from Corinth*

The way Paul speaks of the saints in Romans 16 makes us feel as though he were addressing very important people, yet they are all the common saints. Paul

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mentions both the Jews, his kinsmen, and the Gentiles. Each saint is mentioned in the sphere of his being in the Lord. The way Paul addresses the saints is itself a practical example of his own receiving of them in the vision of the one new man, which is “the revelation of the mystery.” Moreover, in verse 21 Paul discloses that he is writing from Corinth, and that there are a number of brothers who are with him in that city in a church life that includes all the saints meeting according to the revelation of the mystery. In this verse he says, “Timothy, my fellow worker, [greet you], and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen.” These are Jewish brothers. Timothy was half Jewish and half Greek (Acts 16:1). He is with Paul in Corinth, along with the other Jewish brothers.

Then in verse 22 we read, “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.” This is a very telling insertion in the book of Romans. Paul did not actually pen the epistle. He had a secretary. And the secretary took the liberty at the end to greet the saints himself. This testifies to the warm and spontaneous relationship the brothers had with each other. Tertius’ name is of Latin origin. Thus, in his letter Paul includes the fact that a Gentile is co-working with him in the church in Corinth.

In verse 23 Paul mentions “Gaius, my host.” Paul also speaks of Gaius in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as a brother that he

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had personally baptized. Now this brother had opened his home to become Paul's host. Probably Gaius had more financial substance to have a larger home for the sake of the church life. From the wording in verse 23, "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church," it is likely that the whole church met in his house. This could have been where they all came together in one place (1 Cor. 14:23).

The way Paul writes to the saints in Rome from Corinth, where a church life was going on with Jews and Gentiles meeting together as one, is a living testimony of what the church should be (Rom. 16:21-23). In the city of Corinth, the church was actually gathering in one place. Of course, they had problems, but their problems were of a different nature and broke out in a different way. Nevertheless, they were the church in that city, and Paul was writing to Rome in the context of a locality where the Jew and the Gentile had actually joined together into one.

By using the phrase "the whole church" in Romans 16:23, Paul is indirectly sending a signal to Rome concerning the gathering of the saints in Corinth. The mention of four Jewish brothers, including Timothy, and three Gentile brothers, all speaking together with the whole church in Corinth, is a testimony to the Roman saints of the mystery of Christ being worked out in that city.

Finally, in verse 23 Paul says, "Erastus, the treasurer

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of the city, greets you.” This tells us that one of the city officials from Corinth was meeting with the saints there. He also was a Gentile. Then, the last person mentioned in verse 23 is Quartus: “And Quartus, [the] brother.” We do not know anything about Quartus, except that he is called “the brother” and is of Gentile origin.

Here in Corinth are the Gentiles and the Jews together with Paul as the whole church, giving their greetings to the saints in Rome. In Rome the saints were somewhat separated from each other. The Jews and the Gentiles were each tending to group by themselves. There was even some despising and judging that existed among them. Thus, Paul’s manner of writing from Corinth gives a practical example of the new man gathered as one church in that city. Romans 16:21-23 prepares the way for Paul’s prayer in verses 25-27. When he says, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, [that is, the proclamation] of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery,” he utters this prayer for the establishing of the saints in Rome in the context of the established church in Corinth.

The significance of greeting the saints

Paul uses the word “greet” many times in Romans 16.

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It comes from the Greek word ἀσπάζομαι, which means “to embrace.” The root meaning is to draw someone near or toward you. It is similar to the Greek word for “receive” in chapters 14 and 15. So when Paul tells the saints to greet one another, he is talking about more than just a casual greeting. In our culture, the word “greet” tends to be in the category of a polite “Good morning.” This is the way we usually understand greeting, but that is not its significance in Romans 16.

The kind of greeting that Paul speaks of here in Romans is based upon a deep revelation of the mystery of Christ in one organic Body. Each saint is a particular member of Christ that we are to receive and embrace. The Greek word for “greet” also implies not just casual acquaintances but family relationships. We are members of the family of God. This is why you want to embrace the saints in a warm way. So Paul says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16a). This is the atmosphere found in this closing chapter.

Dealing with the problem of divisions

Along with Paul’s positive words on the establishing of the saints in Rome, there is also a negative warning. While he says, “greet,” “embrace,” and “receive,” he also

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says, “avoid,” or “turn away from,” some. The same man who says “receive” also says “avoid.” How can you have receiving and avoiding at the same time? To answer this we need to look at Romans 16:17-20: ¹⁷ “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and [causes of stumbling], contrary to the [teaching] which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹ For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I [rejoice over you]; but I want you to be wise [as to] what is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” Here Paul shows us the need to preserve the receiving by avoiding those whose actions are persistently divisive.

If the establishing of the church is related to the receiving of the saints according to the revelation of the mystery, then Satan’s greatest attack on the church will be to disturb and frustrate the receiving. The church is the highest place in the universe to receive one another. It is the church of the living God. It is not a certain group; it is not a denomination; nor is it anyone’s private work. The church is where we are all blended as one Body by the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Yet, because

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there is an enemy of the building up of the Body, Paul gives a clear warning concerning divisions and causes of stumbling.

As long as some would persist in letting Satan into the church through divisiveness and actions that cause the saints to stumble and not receive one another in a simple way, then the Bible says to avoid them, to turn away from them. The turning away here is not contradictory to receiving the saints. Indeed, it is an action that preserves the atmosphere of receiving. The divisions and causes of stumbling are attacks on the receiving. Paul makes this clear in Romans 14, where there was not only despising and judging taking place between the saints, but also a tendency among them to group together according to their preferences, causing division. The reason Paul pleads for the receiving is that there was not a receiving atmosphere governing the saints' relationships.

When some persist in not receiving, then it is necessary to exercise caution, to mark them and avoid them, as Paul said. Such an apparently negative action, in reality, tells how positive and precious the atmosphere of receiving is in the church. It is worthy of being guarded and protected. Satan uses people to seek to "deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:18). The simple here are not simple-minded people but saints who are guileless

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and not distrusting toward others. Where there is simplicity there is not an atmosphere of suspicion. We just love Jesus, and we love one another.

It is this state of simplicity among the saints that Satan hates and seeks to disintegrate. It is this kind of church, where there is a genuine receiving between the saints, that Satan attacks through persons who cause division and occasions of stumbling. So we need to be made aware of the enemy's subtle attacks. He comes with smooth words and flattering speech and a pseudo-spirituality. You know when you have touched that realm because you are left with death, you are left with inward ruptures, you are left with evil thoughts and suspicions, and you are left with opinions. That is why Paul says to avoid those who cause such things. This is all part of the establishing of the church as the one new man in a practical way. This is a matter of the house of God, where there is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit among us. We treasure this reality.

The peace between us is a precious commodity. It is the bond that unites us to receive one another as Christ received us. When we take care of the peace, Satan's head is crushed. It is the God of peace who crushes Satan (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20). We come back to the peace. We let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts. It is to this

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peace that we were called in one Body (Col. 3:15).

Thank God that we could be established according to the revelation of the mystery. The establishing is in the receiving. Thus, receiving is a great matter in God's establishing of the church in oneness.

