

The Multifaceted Family of God

"Community • Home • Unity • Relationship • Care • Hope"

Full Commentary on Romans 16 • Compiled by Shane Gunn • ESV & LXX

Introduction

Throughout Scripture, God's people are never presented as a narrow demographic. Instead, God's household includes men and women, children and elders, singles and married persons, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, urban and rural believers. Romans 16 is not merely a list of names — it is Paul's theological conclusion to Romans 1–15, showing what God's new covenant family actually looks like in practice.

Section 1: The Biblical Vision

Multiethnic (Genesis → Revelation)

"...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 12:3 (ESV)

LXX: πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς

"I will make you as a light for the nations."

Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

LXX: εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν

"...a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language."

Revelation 7:9 (ESV)

Intergenerational

Train the young. Honor the elderly. Protect children. Care for widows.

Titus 2:4–6 (ESV)

"Teach them diligently to your children..."

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (ESV)

LXX: ἄκουε, Ἰσραὴλ

Women in Meaningful Ministry

Phoebe: deacon and patron of many. Junia: outstanding among the apostles.

Romans 16:1–2 (ESV)

Section 2: Romans 16 — Member by Member

Phoebe

Deacon & Patron (Romans 16:1-2)

Phoebe is described as a *diakonos* (minister/deacon) of the church at Cenchreae and a *prostatis* (patron, benefactor, financial supporter). She carried Paul's letter to Rome and was expected to explain it to its recipients. Her role demonstrates that women held leadership, financial influence, and teaching responsibility in the early Church. Phoebe embodies the truth that women are essential workers in the gospel mission.

Prisca (Priscilla) & Aquila

Married Teachers & Church Planters

A powerhouse ministry team. They taught Apollos (Acts 18), hosted a house church, and financially supported Paul as fellow tentmakers. They were expelled from Rome under Emperor Claudius (AD 49) and had now returned. Priscilla's name is listed first by Paul — many scholars understand this as acknowledging her prominence in their shared ministry.

Andronicus & Junia

Apostolic Figures (Romans 16:7)

Paul calls them "outstanding among the apostles" — imprisoned for Christ, in the faith before Paul himself. Junia is a woman listed as an apostle — a monumental example of gender-inclusive leadership within the early Christian family. The text is clear; the only debate came from later medieval scribes who changed her name to masculine form.

Romans 16:7 (ESV): "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."

Phoebe, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis

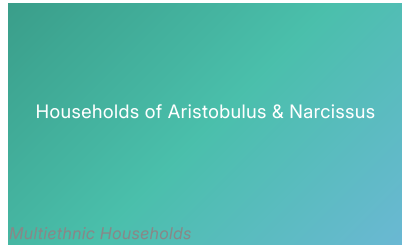
Laborers in the Lord

Paul uses the Greek word *kopiaō* for each of these women — a word meaning strenuous, costly labour. This is the same word Paul uses for his own apostolic work. These women were not helpers on the margin; they were central workers in the mission of God.

Rufus & His Mother

Spiritual Family

Paul describes Rufus's mother as "a mother to me also" — revealing maternal, familial bonds within the Church that crossed bloodlines. Some scholars connect Rufus with the son of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21, LXX: Σίμωνα Κυρηναῖον), linking the Romans household directly to the Passion narrative.



These two households likely included Jews, Gentiles, slaves, freedpersons, and multiple generations. The gospel reached into the complex social structures of Roman household economy. Two of the most powerful households in Rome — possibly connected to Herod's family and the Emperor's court — had believers within them.

Section 3: Practical Application



Embrace Multiethnic Community

- Create diverse leadership platforms
- Practice multilingual worship where possible
- Encourage cross-cultural friendships
- Celebrate ethnic heritage as expressions of God's creativity



Empower Women in Ministry

- Teach Romans 16 publicly
- Honor the spiritual mothers of the church
- Create discipleship pathways for women
- Normalize men and women co-laboring



Incorporate Children

- Encourage intergenerational worship
- Invite children to participate in prayer
- Train parents to disciple at home
- Celebrate childlike faith as Jesus did



Cultivate a Culture of Honor

- Speak honor publicly to servants
- Thank those laboring behind the scenes
- Recognize marginalized believers
- Build gratitude into gatherings

The Spirit Among Us — 1 Corinthians 3:16

Carmen Joy Imes highlights that Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 3:16 — often translated as "God's Spirit dwells *in* you" — is better understood as "God's Spirit dwells *among* you." The Greek phrase **ἐν ὑμῖν** (*en hymin*) uses a plural pronoun. Paul is addressing the entire community, not isolated individuals.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

LXX/Greek: οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν οἰκεῖ;

This reading restores the communal nature of the Spirit's presence. The Spirit dwells particularly in the unified, worshiping, holy community — paralleling Old Testament patterns where God's presence dwelled among Israel as a people (cf. LXX Exodus 25:8: κατασκηνώσω ἐν αὐτοῖς).

Paul's Vision: A Blueprint for the Modern Church

Romans 16 is a model: multiethnic, intergenerational, women and men co-working, children in the household, serving and teaching and hosting. This is the family God promised to Abraham, the family Jesus died to create, and the family the Spirit empowers to bless the world.

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