

# Keener Romans Session17 Podcast

Welcome to our deep dive today. Oh, great. We're going to be cracking open Romans 16, but not just for the usual stuff.

You requested a deep dive into the women that are mentioned in this chapter, and with some help from scholar Craig Keener and some of his work, we're going to be uncovering just how active women were in the early church. Roman society wasn't exactly known for... For female empowerment? Yeah. Female empowerment.

Right. So this is going to be interesting. Definitely.

Indeed. Romans 16 provides a fascinating kind of counter narrative to what we might expect. Yeah.

Keener's insights really help illuminate the roles that these women played. Okay. So let's unpack this.

Yeah. Right away, we bump into Junia. Oh, yeah.

And Paul calls her outstanding among the apostles, which is a pretty big deal, right? Huge. But there's been this whole debate about her name. Right.

Some folks claiming it was Junius, a male name. Yeah. What's the truth there? Well, that's where Keener's expertise comes in.

Okay. He demonstrates through his research that Junia was definitively a female name in ancient texts. Okay.

And that completely debunks that Junius theory. So we are talking about a woman recognized as an apostle, a position of authority and leadership. So that challenges some traditional interpretations, huh? For sure.

But wasn't the term apostle usually reserved for like- You would think. The original 12 disciples? Yeah. That's a common assumption.

Okay. But the concept of apostle in the early church was actually broader than that. Okay.

Paul himself, for example, is considered an apostle, even though he wasn't one of the original 12. Right. And what's intriguing is that even in later centuries, when women's roles became more restricted, figures like John Chrysostom, a prominent theologian, still acknowledged Junia as a female apostle.

Wow. So it makes you wonder why her apostleship is even questioned. Yeah.

It really makes you think about historical bias, right? Yeah. And how that has shaped our understanding. Absolutely.

And this isn't just ancient history. Right. This is relevant to how we view women in ministry roles today.

Exactly. Okay. So we got Junia the apostle.

Yep. But Keener points out this other statistic that just blew me away. Oh yeah.

Apparently, Paul greets twice as many men as women in Romans 16. But here's the kicker. He commends twice as many women.

Wow. Yeah. What's the significance of that? That's a really insightful observation.

Yeah. And it speaks to the impact these women had. Okay.

When Paul commends someone, he's not just giving them a casual shout out. Right. He's highlighting their contributions.

Okay. Their character, their influence within the community. Yeah.

The fact that he commends twice as many women, despite the numerical disparity, suggests they were making a significant difference in the Roman church. So we're seeing that these women weren't just background figures. Yeah.

They were active participants. Active. But wait a minute.

Doesn't Paul also talk about women being silent in church in some of his other letters? He does. How does that square with everything we're seeing in Romans? That's a fair question. Yeah.

And it's a tension that scholars have grappled with for centuries. Keener argues that those silence texts, primarily found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, are likely referring to specific situations. Okay.

So they might be addressing disruptive behavior, like women interrupting the teaching with excessive questions. Right. And it's important to remember the cultural context here.

Right. Women often had limited education compared to men. Right.

And there were strong social norms against women speaking publicly. Right. So Paul's instructions may have been aimed at maintaining order and decorum in those specific settings.

That makes sense, considering the dynamics of those house churches, which were often the primary meeting places for early Christians. Right. Was it even considered public speaking in those contexts? That's a good question.

It's a whole different world than our modern church gatherings. Right. Speaking of defying expectations.

Yes. Let's talk about Phoebe. Okay.

Paul calls her a diakonos. Yes, he does. Can you break that down for us? Yeah.

So diakonos is a Greek word that can be translated as servant or minister. Okay. And what's important here is that Paul uses this same term for himself and other male leaders in the church.

Okay. So when he refers to Phoebe as a diakonos, he's placing her squarely within that ministry context. So we're not just talking about her serving snacks at the fellowship potluck, right? No.

This is about her having a recognized role in ministry. Exactly. Okay.

And what about Prisca, or Priscilla, as she's sometimes called? Yeah. She and her husband, Akela. Yes.

Are mentioned quite a bit in the New Testament. Yes, they are. What was their role? Absolutely.

Yeah. So Prisca and Akela were a dynamic ministry duo. Okay.

And it's interesting to note that she's often mentioned first. Oh. In the New Testament.

Suggesting she might've even taken the lead in some instances. Wow. This challenges the traditional idea that women were always subservient to their husbands in ministry contexts.

Okay. It appears they worked as partners. Okay.

Complementing each other's gifts and abilities. It's like trying to fit these early Christians into our modern church categories just doesn't work. It doesn't.

The term pastor doesn't even appear in the New Testament. Right. So it's not about finding exact matches.

Yeah. But understanding the roles they actually filled. And it's interesting that we're seeing these prominent women mentioned in letters to specific locations.

Yes. Keener points out that Romans and Philippians, two of the letters where women are mentioned most prominently, were written to churches and cities known for being more gender progressive than others at the time. Interesting.

Yeah. That's a fascinating observation. Yeah.

It raises the question of whether those more open environments might have fostered greater female participation in ministry. Yeah. Makes sense.

Did women in those cities feel more empowered to step into leadership roles because of the surrounding culture? Right. It's certainly something to consider. Okay.

So we've got Junia the Apostle. Yeah. Women being commended for their contributions.

Phoebe the Diakonos. And Prisca partnering with Aquila in ministry. Yes.

And we haven't even touched on all the other women mentioned in Romans 16. I know. You mentioned that Keener has some insight into their names.

Yes. Can you tell us about that? Yeah. It's fascinating how much we can glean from their names alone.

Okay. So take Tryphena and Tryphosa, for example. Okay.

Their names suggest that they were likely twins. Oh. Highlighting the importance of family ties within the early church.

Okay. Then we have Persis. Okay.

A relatively rare name that suggests she was either a slave or a freed woman. Wow. Originally from Persia.

Okay. Her presence hints at the diverse backgrounds. Yeah.

Represented in Roman Christianity. That's amazing. It's like these names are little windows into their lives.

Yes. Revealing this rich tapestry of the early church. They really are.

And speaking of personal connections. Yeah. Paul makes this interesting reference to Rufus's mother, who has been a mother to me too.

I love that. What's the significance of that? That's a beautiful example of what scholars call fictive kinship. Okay.

So in the early church. Yeah. As well as in many cultures throughout history, people often formed deep bonds that extended beyond blood relations.

Okay. They would refer to each other as brother or sister, mother or father. Right.

Even though they weren't biologically related. Right. This practice reflected the profound sense of community and belonging that characterized early Christianity.

It's like the modern day use of brother and sister in church, but on a much deeper level. Absolutely. It speaks to the intense bonds that they formed.

It does. And there's even more intrigue surrounding this mention of Rufus's mother. Keener suggests that Rufus might be the son of Simon of Cyrene.

Interesting. The man who helped Jesus carry the cross. Wow.

So this prominent woman who Paul calls mother. Yeah. Might have a direct connection to one of the most pivotal events in the Gospels.

That's a fascinating possibility. It is. And it highlights just how intertwined these early Christians were.

Their lives intersected with the unfolding story of the faith. So we're seeing these women weren't just names on a list. Right.

They were active participants. Yes. Leaders and even mothers to those in need.

Right. But Romans 16 isn't just about celebrating women in ministry. Right.

Paul also shifts gears towards the end. He does. And issues some serious warnings.

Yeah. He speaks about deceptive teachers and emphasizes the importance of obedience. Okay.

To apostolic teaching. Yeah. He's reminding the Roman Christians that not everyone who claims to follow Christ is actually aligned with the truth.

It seems like a pretty strong message for a letter that's mostly been about personal greetings and commendations. Well, remember the context. Okay.

Paul was writing to a church in Rome. Yeah. The heart of the Roman Empire.

Right. This was a time of great social and political upheaval. Right.

And early Christians were often viewed with suspicion and hostility. Right. So it's understandable that Paul would feel the need to address these potential threats.

Right. Both internal and external. So for these early Christians, obedience wasn't just about following rules.

Right. It was about navigating a complex and potentially dangerous world. Precisely.

Their obedience was a matter of survival. Yeah. A way of protecting themselves from both physical harm and spiritual deception.

And Paul wasn't just speculating about their faithfulness. Yeah. He tells them everyone has heard about your obedience.

That's right. That implies their reputation had spread far and wide. It did.

Which is remarkable considering the limitations of communication back then. It is a testament to their steadfastness. Yeah.

Their commitment to living out their faith. Yeah. Even in the face of opposition.

Right. And it sets the stage for Paul's powerful imagery in the next verse. Okay.

Where he speaks about God crushing Satan beneath their feet. Wow. That's intense.

It is. And it's important to understand how Keener connects this imagery back to earlier themes in Romans. Okay.

Particularly the idea of spiritual slavery. Mm-hmm. Paul repeatedly emphasizes that we are called to be slaves to righteousness.

Okay. Not to sin. Right.

This image of crushing Satan isn't just about some distant future event. Okay. It's about the daily choice to align ourselves with God's will.

Right. To resist temptation, to live in obedience. So it's an active, ongoing battle.

Absolutely. Yeah. And it's a reminder that our choices have consequences.

Okay. Just as Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden led to the fall of humanity. Yeah.

Our obedience can pave the way for a different kind of future. Okay. A future where God's reign is fully realized.

And speaking of Adam and Eve. Yes. This is where Keener makes a fascinating connection.

Between Romans 16.20 and the Genesis account of the fall. Oh, wow. He sees a deliberate reversal of Adam happening here.

Interesting. Hold on. A reversal of Adam.

What does that even mean? So in Genesis, Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent. Right. To eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Right. They disobey God's command. Yeah.

And their pursuit of forbidden knowledge leads to sin and separation from God. Okay. But in Romans 16.20. Yeah.

Paul urges the Roman Christians to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. So instead of seeking knowledge that leads them away from God. Right.

He's encouraging them to focus on knowledge that draws them closer to God. Exactly. He's not advocating for ignorance.

Okay. But for a discerning wisdom. Yeah.

That prioritizes what is truly good and life-giving. Okay. It's about choosing to align ourselves with God's purposes.

Yeah. Not with the deceptive schemes of Satan. And it's interesting that you mentioned deception because Keener points out that Satan is often associated with deception, temptation, and accusation throughout scripture.

Right. We see it in the Old Testament stories like Job. Yes.

And Zechariah. And it carries over into the New Testament as well. Absolutely.

That idea of Satan as the accuser is particularly relevant. Okay. When we consider Romans as a whole.

Yeah. Paul spends a significant portion of this letter unpacking the concept of justification. Mm-hmm.

He argues that we are made righteous through faith in Christ. Right. Not through our own efforts.

Right. So in a sense, Romans can be seen as a letter about countering the accusations of Satan. So by urging obedience and a focus on what is good.

Yeah. Paul is essentially equipping the Romans to resist those accusations and stand firm. Yes.

In their identity as those who have been justified by God. Precisely. Yep.

And it's worth noting that Paul doesn't shy away from acknowledging the reality of spiritual warfare. Right. He warns the Romans about deceptive teachers.

Right. Those who exploit others for their own gain. Mm-hmm.

This isn't just about abstract theological concepts. It's about real people. Right.

And the very real dangers they face. It makes you realize how relevant Paul's message is to us today. Absolutely.

We still live in a world where deception is rampant. It is. Where people are constantly trying to manipulate and exploit us.

For sure. And just like the early Christians, we need discernment. Yes.

That ability to recognize false teachings. Right. And the courage to stand firm in our faith.

Yes. Okay. So we've covered a lot of ground in this first part of our deep dive.

We have. We've seen how Romans 16 challenges traditional interpretations about the role of women. Yeah.

In the early church. Right. And we've explored Paul's emphasis on obedience.

Yes. In the context of spiritual warfare. It's fascinating how Paul weaves together these seemingly disparate themes.

Yeah. Obedience. Spiritual warfare.

Mm-hmm. The role of women in ministry and the ultimate triumph of God. Yeah.

It all contributes to a rich tapestry. Right. Of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

And there's still more to unpack. There is. Paul hasn't finished greeting everyone in the Roman church.

Nope. And there are some intriguing details hidden within those names. There are.

We'll dive into all of that when we continue our deep dive in part two. Sounds good. Picking up where we left off.

Yeah. It's fascinating to consider these personal greetings. Yeah.

In the context of what we just discussed. Yeah. Paul talks about obedience, spiritual warfare, then bam.

Right. He's sending greetings to specific people. Right.

What do you make of that? You know, it's almost like a breath of fresh air, right? Yeah. After all that heavy stuff about deception and resisting temptation. Yeah.

We get this reminder. We do. That the heart of Christianity is about relationships.

It is. It's about people. Mm-hmm.

Community, caring for one another. Exactly. It would be easy for Paul to get bogged down.

Yeah. In theological debates. Yeah.

But he never loses sight of the personal touch. Right. And it's not just a generic, hey everyone.

Right. He's mentioning individuals by name. Yeah.

Acknowledging their contributions. Even sending greetings to entire households. Right.

It speaks volumes about the value he placed on each member of the community. Yeah. It really personalizes the letter.

Yeah. I mean, who were some of these folks? Right. Do we know anything about them? Keener actually shed some light on a few of these individuals.

Okay. We learn about Ampliatus and Urbanus. Okay.

Likely freedmen. Okay. Right.

Which means they were former slaves who gained their freedom. Gotcha. Then there's the mention of the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus.

Right. Both figures connected to powerful Roman families. Wow.

It's a glimpse into the social diversity of the early church. So it wasn't just a movement for the poor and marginalized? Right. It challenges the assumption.

Yeah. That early Christianity was confined to the fringes of society. Okay.



We're seeing believers connected to the very heart of Roman power. Even if those connections were through household slaves or freedmen. Right.

It speaks to the widespread appeal of the gospel message. It's amazing to think about those early Christians navigating those social circles. I know.

And we've got Trafina and Trifosa. Yes. Those possible twins we talked about.

Right. Showing those family ties within the early church. Yes.

And then there's Persis, whose name hinted at a Persian background. Right. A reminder of the geographical reach of the gospel.

Yeah. Even in those early days. These names, as Keener points out.

Yeah. Offer us glimpses into the lives and backgrounds of these early Christians. Right.

It's a reminder that the story of the faith. Yeah. Is a global story.

Yeah. One that has always embraced people from diverse cultures and social standings. And it's not just about diversity of background, right? Right.

It's about the depth of their relationships. It is. We talked about that example of Paul referring to Rufus's mother as my mother.

Yes. Right. Yes.

That's a beautiful testament to the power of shared faith. Yeah. To create those deep and lasting connections.

Right. And it goes beyond those cultural norms of fictive kinship we discussed. These early Christians understood that in Christ, they were more than just friends or acquaintances.

Right. They were brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. Yeah.

Bound together by a love that transcended earthly ties. Okay. So, we got this beautiful mix of greetings.

Yes. Personal connections. And then Paul drops this line.

Okay. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Oh, yeah.

Now, we know that was a common cultural greeting back then. It was. But what's the significance of it in this context? Well, on one level, it was a customary sign of affection and respect.

Right. Like a handshake or a hug today. Okay.

But within the Christian community, it took on a deeper meaning. Okay. It was an expression of unity.

Okay. A tangible reminder that they were one body in Christ. So, it's not just about social etiquette.

It's about embodying their shared faith. Exactly. That physical act of greeting.

Yeah. Reinforced the spiritual reality of their unity. Right.

And considering the potential for division and conflict within the Roman Church. Right. Which Paul addressed early in the letter.

Yeah. This call for a holy kiss was probably very timely. Right.

But he had already mentioned those disagreements about food. Right. Different understandings of the law.

Yeah. The danger of judging one another. Right.

So, this holy kiss was about actively cultivating peace and unity within the community. Precisely. It's a call to move beyond those differences.

Right. And embrace their shared identity in Christ. And it wasn't just about internal unity either, right? Right.

Paul also emphasizes that all the churches greet you. That's right. Extending those bonds of fellowship.

Yes. Beyond Rome to the wider Christian world. That's a key point.

It paints a picture of the early church. Yeah. As a network of interconnected communities.

Right. Supporting and encouraging one another in their shared faith. Yeah.

We see the seeds of what would become a global movement. It's amazing to think about how that sense of connection and shared purpose fueled the growth of the early church. Yeah.

It is. So, as we wrap up this part of our deep dive. Yeah.

I'm struck by how Paul masterfully balances those theological depths. Yeah. With practical guidance and personal connection.

I completely agree. It's a reminder that faith isn't just about abstract ideas. Right.

It's about living out those beliefs in a real intangible way. Yeah. And for me, it's fascinating how these personal greetings in Romans 16.

Yeah. Challenge us to rethink traditional assumptions about the composition of the early church. Right.

We see people from diverse backgrounds, social classes, and family structures all coming together under the banner of Christ. It's a powerful reminder that the story of the faith is a far richer and more complex tapestry than we often imagine. It is.

And for those of you listening, here's something to consider. Okay. If those early Christians facing persecution.

Right. Navigating a complex social landscape. Yeah.

Could find such unity and purpose in their shared faith. What might that tell us about the potential for unity and purpose in our own communities today? It's remarkable how even after all those greetings, Paul still has more to say. I know.

Right? He doesn't just sign off with like, you know, best wishes and see you later. It's like he saved some of his most powerful statements for the very end of the letter. Absolutely.

These final verses of Romans 16 are packed with warnings. Yeah. Exhortations and a beautiful doxology that kind of ties everything together.

Okay. So what's the gist of these final warnings? What's Paul concerned about? He's warning the Roman Christians to be on guard against those who cause division and teach things contrary to the gospel. Oh, okay.

He specifically mentions those who create obstacles and difficulties instead of following the teachings that they have received. So it's not just about avoiding like false doctrine or heresy. Right.

It's about recognizing those who disrupt the unity. Yes. And peace of the community.

Exactly. He's calling for discernment. Yeah.

Urging them to be wise and discerning about who they allow to influence their faith. And this isn't just an abstract concern. No.

Paul gets pretty specific about the tactics these troublemakers use. Yeah, he does. He talks about them deceiving the hearts of the innocent.

Right. With smooth talk and flattery. Right.

It sounds like something we could still encounter today. Absolutely relevant. We see these same tactics used in all sorts of contexts.

Yeah. From manipulative relationships to deceptive marketing schemes. Right.

Paul is reminding us that spiritual deception can be just as subtle and insidious. Yeah. As any other form of manipulation.

So how do we guard against it? What's the antidote to this kind of deception? Paul's answer is clear obedience to the truth. Okay. He urges the Romans to be obedient in doing what is good.

Mm-hmm. He's calling them to live out their faith in a way that is consistent with the gospel message they've received. And it's interesting how he connects this obedience to the idea of being wise in what is good.

Yes. And innocent in what is evil. Right.

Which echoes those themes of the reversal of Adam we discussed earlier. So it's all tied together. Paul is essentially saying that true wisdom and innocence are found.

Yeah. Not in seeking forbidden knowledge, but in aligning ourselves with God's will. Okay.

Which is ultimately for our good. It's a reminder that obedience isn't about blindly following rules. It's about choosing a path that leads to life, to wholeness.

Right. To true freedom. And that freedom is ultimately found in Christ.

That's where Paul's powerful doxology comes in. Yeah. He bursts forth in praise of God.

Right. To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's like he's bringing the whole letter full circle, right? He is. Reminding us that despite the challenges. Yeah.

The warning, the potential for conflict. Mm-hmm. The ultimate source of our hope and victory is in God.

It's a beautiful ending to a letter that's been full of theological depth. Yeah. Practical guidance and personal connection.

So as we wrap up this deep dive into Romans 16. Yeah. What's the key takeaway for now? For me, it's the recognition that the early church was far more diverse.

Yeah. And dynamic than we often imagine. Yeah.

It wasn't what we thought it was. We see women in leadership roles. Mm-hmm.

People from all walks of life coming together. Right. And a deep commitment to unity and obedience.

Yeah. I mean, it's a challenging cultural landscape. Yeah.

For me, it's the reminder that faith is both personal and communal. Yes. We need each other.

Absolutely. We need to be discerning about who influences us. Yes.

And we need to be rooted in the truth of the gospel. For sure. It's a story that continues to inspire and challenge us today.

Absolutely. And for those of you listening, here's a final thought to ponder. Okay.

As you reflect on the stories of these early Christians, their challenges, their triumphs, their unwavering faith, Right. what lessons can you glean for your own journey of faith? That's a good question. How might their example encourage and equip you Yeah.

to live out the gospel in your own unique context, whatever that may be? Great question. Thanks for joining me for this deep dive. Yeah, this was a lot of fun.

I really enjoyed it.