

Church Life  
Romans 16:6-16

We started looking at this long list of individuals that Paul knew in one way or another from Rome and sends personal greetings. And it so easy to think that Paul was this intellectual and academic giant who cared only about intellectual thought and stimulation. He would rather be in a library all by himself than in a room full of people. If we just read the Book of Romans without this closing chapter we might jump to the conclusion that Paul was not a people person. But we see the exact opposite from this wide swath of people from various walks of life and backgrounds. He related to all different types of people and loved all different types.

And it would be so easy to say that I am just not a people person. And some people, maybe even the vast majority of people find that they are introverts. They love being by themselves or just with their family or a few select friends. They might even dream of being on a desert island, off the grid where they really did not have to socialize with others. Relationships are difficult and trying and messy. People are imperfect and they will bring problems and difficulties in our lives.

But even if we are more introverted, we have to learn to relate and love people. We cannot make the excuse - that is the way we are made and there is nothing we can do about it. God commands and demands of all his children love one another - that they seek to be involved with one another, that we seek to get outside of ourselves and outside of our little comfortable nucleus of easy friendships, and love and minister to others. You look at heaven and we are never alone. We are certainly with Christ but all other believers also - singing and rejoicing and loving others. Well, if in this life we are being sanctified what will be finished in eternity than that process of loving others is going on. And God has given us an entity where we can learn to come out of what is just comfortable. We can learn to give of ourselves. We can grow in the knowledge of God and we can also grow in our service to others for the glory of God.

And so we have this long list of names. And it is so tempting to just skip over the twenty-two names plus two households that are listed here. But God in his sovereignty put these names here. He had Paul establish authentic relationships with them that their names might be recorded here. And they are not just recorded as a memorial for them, but the little comments made about these individuals is intended for our good. As we seek to think about the members that made up the Church of Rome we start to get a snapshot of the early church and what early church life looked like. And every church has some sort of vibe. You get that when you walk in the door. Some churches are welcoming and some seem more sullen. Some are more relaxed and others are more formal. Some are very silent and reverent before the service while others are boisterous and loud and joyful. And here is the question: what is the vibe of the church that is at Rome? And I maintain it is one of Christ-like love for one another with a unified goal of glorifying God through mutual edification. You get that sense from the names in this list and the few comments that Paul makes about them.

So what I want to do this morning, and I hope it will be a blessing and encouragement to you is go through the list of names, very quickly, giving a few comments to help us meditate on these individuals and their blessing to the church and Paul, and then draw out some observations for us. Hopefully we will even

recognize some of the names in this church because we have seen the semblance of ministry in our own lives through members of our own church for the glory of God.

1. Let's understand the names. Vv. 6-8

It is amazing how these are just names that are on the page. And yet each name represents a person who lived and functioned in this world. Even the ones who have a brief description of, very little is known about their lives. Even though they had hopes, dreams, struggles, adversity, worked and laboured in various fields, and even raised families. Their name is just a name on the page. All of that is forgotten. And as I have pastored here the last twenty years, it is incredible the number of funerals that I have officiated. And most of the people in my early ministry have been forgotten by time. Bunny Harvey, or Phil and Elsie Weller are just names to most people. But here is the thing: they are not only remembered by God, but this text says that their lives and service and ministry in the earthly lives really meant something. After going over the great hope we have in Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:58, **"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."** Listen to what he says to all the saints in Corinth that have been forgotten in time, "in the Lord your labour is not in vain." It has meaning for all of eternity. And certainly as we look at this list, this is one of the points why God has this greeting here is that their labour was not in vain.

So look at verse 6-7, **"Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."** Now there are a number of Mary's that are mentioned in the gospels, and we have no reason to try and identify this Mary with one of them. This is one that laboured and was active in the church for the glory of God and the welfare of the saints, and again, her labour was not in vain. And then there is Andronicus and Junia who are Paul's kinsman. This probably does not mean that they were related or family members of Paul, but Jewish believers like Paul. And Paul indicates three other things about them. They were in prison with them. Again, nothing indicates when. Second, they are well known among the apostles, and they were in Christ before Paul was a Christian. So that means they were part of the early church, and maybe came to Rome during the early persecution that was at the hands of Paul or Saul of Tarsus. We really do not know. Can you imagine their history? Maybe they had even seen Christ. Maybe they were present at Pentecost. We just do not know. The life of this couple is contained in this verse, but well know and used by God in no doubt extraordinary ways for his glory, and never forgotten by Him.

Look at verse 8, **"Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord."** Here is he that loved Paul and other believers. And again, all that is known of him for sure is right here. But in the Christian catacombs is a tomb related to a woman of high stature with this name on it. It is only this name, and this was a name usually given to a slave and slaves usually only had one name. And even though this tomb is in the catacomb of a rich lady, it is elaborate, and speaks that this slave was well loved by the people of God. Could this be this man? He was "beloved in the Lord," even though a slave.

Look at verses 9-10, **"Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who**

**belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.**" Now we have four individuals and two households in these verses. All we know again of the four mentioned is what is right here. Urbanus worked and laboured with Paul. These were not consumer Christians but people who were living examples of what believers are to be. Stachys is loved by Paul, Apelles is in some means approved in Christ in some way that his faith has been tested and found to be authentic which would be a story in and of itself. And Herodion is a fellow Jew like Paul. Then there are two households. Aristobolus and Narcissus. It is interesting that the men are not greeted directly but his household. And the household referred to not only the family but also the servants or the slaves of the family. And these were huge households. Aristobolus was the name of the grandson of Herod the great, and this could be referring to his household. And if this is the Narcissus of history then he was one of the most powerful men of his day. And here the gospel has penetrated the most powerful households of that day - slaves and maybe even members of the families of these men.

Look at the next couple of verses, "**Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.**" Tryphaena and Tryphosa are names of two women, and "those workers of the Lord," is present active which means that they are serving today. What happened to Persis, because it says "who has worked hard in the Lord," which means she is not working hard now. It is past tense. And this could be an elderly woman or someone who was injured and can no longer do the labour that she once did. There are a whole swath of various different ages in this church.

Let me spend a moment on Rufus and his mother. The dad is probably dead at this time. But people are fascinated by the name Rufus. Who is he? Well, we cannot be sure, but over in the gospel of Mark, in Mark 15:21, "**And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.**" Notice that Mark identifies Simon of Cyrene as the one who is pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus. Now he says that he is the father of Rufus and Alexander. There is no reason to give this tidbit of information unless the audience that Mark is writing to knows Rufus and Alexander. Well, who is the Book of Romans written to? It is written to the Romans. Could this be the Rufus, the son of the man that carried the cross of Jesus? We really cannot say for sure, but he and his mother had been a special blessing to God. It is incredible to see these connections, and many of them lost in history but never forgotten by our Lord.

Look at verse 14, "**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.**" Now notice that these men are all named together, and then at the end, "the brothers who are with them." In other words, they are five of a larger group. And these could be slaves or freemen that are involved in the same trade. But these would be something like a guild of men that all worked together, and might have even lived together. Could they be fellow tent makers?

Then we have a final greeting of people in verse 15, "**Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.**" Paul extends greetings to this last group of people. And it would be easy to make

conjectures about names and such. This all we know about them, but they all have histories, and they all function in the church at Rome, and they all knew Paul and Paul benefited from them. The whole section ends in verse 16, “**Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.**” And it is amazing because you have these fascinating names and people, even though we do not know that much about, but what catches people’s attention many times is this last verse and the command to greet one another with a holy kiss. And is this something we should do? This is a command. And it misses the whole point. Paul is not instructing us in Christian practice per se. But giving greeting to those in Rome. A hand shake will do well today.

But what are some lessons we can glean from this section?

## 2. Applications from this church.

The church is the visible representation of what God has done and is doing in the world. It is made up of those who are believers who are carrying on the task of making and maturing of disciples for the glory of God. And it is God himself that is adding to the church saints that he has chosen. And they are all useful to him. He places them there. And so often we look at others and think they are so useful but I am not because I am not gifted as they are., But that is the whole point. We do not need a whole bunch of people the same but different. It is in the differences that we can aide one another to grow in Christ and at the same time it is in our differences and the unity that we have in Christ that he is glorified.

The first thing is that there were a variety of different ethnic origins in this church. Again remember, that racism is not a modern day problem but one that existed since the beginning of creation where sinful man tries to show his superiority over others in anyway that he can. One way is through race. But here is a loving church that is ethnically diverse. If we look at the names alone, there are Greek, Roman and Jewish names written here. And yet by what Paul writes here, where that was such a problem and division in the culture around them, it was not a problem in a church. Paul names several individuals that are beloved by him, and they no doubt love him. He names Rufus’ mother as a mother to him. This church in the application of their faith were a family - the family of God. They were brothers and sisters of Christ. And they loved one another. The gospel does away with so many of the social sins that we see in society. And this spoke of what Christ has done, and it was a testimony of his glory.

But another aspect of church functioning and unity that we see in this church is that it eliminated one of the great restrains and separations that existed in the ancient world. And that is the socioeconomic division. We point out that many of these names were common names for slaves. Names like Ampliatus or Urbanus or Phlegon or Hermes were common slave names. Also, Tryphaena and Tryphosis and Persis were common slave names among women. Junia and Julia were names of Roman citizenship. And of course, the households of Narcissus and Aristobulos were names of very powerful and influential people in society. And then there were common labourers. There were freemen and slaves. There was a cross section of society that made up the church - the household of faith. And here is the amazing part. Their status in society doesn’t dictate how they functioned in the church. And the reason why I say that is that they were all functioning in the church in various different ways. Mary worked hard in the Lord. Two were fellow prisoners. Urbanus was a fellow worker. Even though a

slave, he was the same as Paul and the other labourers before God and before others. Perisis worked hard for the Lord. We look at Epaphroditus who was Paul's first convert, and Andronicus and Junia who came to Christ way before Paul, and you have individuals of different maturity levels in the church. But they are all one in Christ. The social stigmas and labels of society didn't cause them to discard one another or not to minister to one another. And the economic differences didn't cause one to be a leader over a slave just because of his economic and social standing. They loved, ministered to one other, and reached out to others speaking forth the gospel of Christ.

And let me just name one other distinctive mark about all these names. And that is that they are made up of both men and women. These fellow workers of God, in God's vineyard and in the church of Jesus Christ are made up of both sexes. And it should be such an encouragement that although we never lose our maleness and femaleness, which much of society is discarding, women were a great blessing to the apostle Paul and the early church. And that is in a day and age where women were really looked upon as inferior to men. Paul sees them, God sees them as fellow image bearers, and God redeems them the same way that he does men. And God works his sanctifying grace in them so that they will grow to reflect Jesus Christ. And as they grow God uses them to be a benefit to others that they may grow into his image. These women worked and laboured hard for Paul and God. This does not mean that the church held an egalitarian position on the sexes and women functioned the same as men. The Bible teaches that there is a dignity in womanhood, and teaches a complementarian view. Men and women in the church, functioning as God's servants complement one another. But the point cannot be lost that women were need for the church to grow and be all that it was intended to be and still women are needed if the church is ever to carry out its gospel mandate door the glory of Christ.

These are names. Maybe one day if the Lord tarries, and Emmanuel Baptist Church as an entity has run its course and is no more, someone will read a roll of members of Emmanuel Baptist Church. And they will just be names. Forgotten by society. Forgotten by time. In fact most of us will be forgotten in a couple generations, or very little remembered about us. But here is the encouragement to press on: not only will we never be forgotten by God, but you labour in the here and now is never in vain. God will produce from it exactly what he wants produced. In fact, these names are still blessing us today. Encourage your heart, and do not be weary in the labour of our great God.