

Christian Greetings

Romans 16:1-16

We are rounding the home stretch of Romans and are welcomed into a list of greetings to nearly 30 people. The feature that jumps out is the variety of people Paul knows.

It is such a full list that some have questioned how he could know so many! But here it is!

Let me say this is not your typical preaching text – a list of greetings. How do you preach that? Well wait and see!

You have a handout that overviews who these people are believed to be. But a name, place and connection may play a part – other factors are put on far higher plane by Paul.

And that is what is at the heart of our message today.

The **first thing** to stand out here is what ties them all together.

Paul uses his favorite way of describing the believer – regardless of their past or place – they are in the Lord, in Christ! 3, 7b, 8, 10.

“Abide in me, and I in you!” said the Savior on the eve of his betrayal.

All He is, is yours – His person, His life, His death, His resurrection, His victory; His Father is ours and His Father’s house; His Spirit is ours, and all the Spirit will do to release the creation into the freedom of the sons of God!

And all we are is his! He placed the name of the true God upon us; He calls us by name; He knows your voice; He sees you, cares for all of you. He has begun a good work in you and will not rest until he brings you to completion to the glory of God and the marvel of angels!

You are not a Christian except Christ is in you, and you are in Christ. You may be in a church and church life is in you; you may have the golden rule in you and seek to walk by that beautiful standard. But without Christ, you are headless, lifeless and lost. With Him, you are a new creature – all things become new! All things are yours in Christ!

That being said, that does not make all of us the exact same. The unity in Christ does not erase our diversity, uniqueness, or personalities.

Paul wrote in chapter 12 these delightful lines:

⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: (Rom 12:4-6)

Our second point is what distinguishes these saints.

There are three distinct groups here. Ask yourself – where do I fit in?

Paul repeatedly says “Beloved” in vs 5, 8, 9b, 12b.

Be loving; without love, all we are is noisy clanging cymbals.

But Paul says “Beloved”. That means you are prized. That without you in the world, in the church, what a lesser place this would be.

You know of what I speak, I hope. Be a person who is more than taking up and filling space; a person for whom others love to be around because you are bettered by them.

Are you a prized person? A gift from God. Or are you, as Spurgeon said, lumps in the oatmeal?

What hole will you leave behind when you leave this planet?

Live to be missed! Especially by the believing community!

The world loves its own; the church loves those in whom Christ dwells. Those who manifest Christ the most, are the most beloved. Are you?

We move on to the next two.

Paul notes several hardworking ones, beginning with Phoebe.

Verse 3, fellow workers Prisca and Aquila (which means ‘the lion’); 6 – Mary who worked hard; 9 – Urbanas our fellow worker; 12 – the twin workers in the Lord; and again, Persis, working hard in the Lord.

All Christians are to be zealous for good works – it flows out of the new life; an eagerness to serve.

Are there obstacles? Of course! Without in the world, within ourselves. But all God’s people bring forth fruit, by which you can know them.

But there are those that bring forth more fruit, much fruit.

Are we addicted to good works, as they are in Christ Jesus? Are we serving the saints, washing their feet?

Paul puts these laborers on a high plane. Let us strive to be so as well.

Are you thinking along these lines? What can you do? Are we setting our thoughts and hearts upon the needs of others as we enter the sanctuary? Our culture says, ‘look out for number one’. But Jesus says love your neighbor as number one.

Now, next Paul praises those who sacrifice and suffer, giving their all. This is Prisca and Aquila again in verse 4, who risked their necks, putting it on the chopping block!

Verse 7 speaks of fellow prisoners with Paul.

Christ's Spirit is at work in the good works done in his name. But as well in sufferings, losses, the crosses endured for the name of Christ.

What would you suffer for Christ? What have you given for Him? What gifts have you poured out on your Savior, like the woman who washed Jesus' feet with tears and dried them with her hair!

See these nameless ones in the Bible, who stand out not for their name but their sacrifices!

And what perfume, what aroma arises to heaven from you? Is it sweet smelling? And pleases the saints?

Caesar would have great containers of incense poured out on the audience of the Coliseum, causing great delight. How much more these gifts which last forever in the halls of glory above?

Live to die! Live to give! This is the path of your Savior! Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!

So, Beloved! Hardworking! Sacrificial!

This leaves a handful of remaining observations.

Verse 7 – 'outstanding' among the apostles; that is outstanding to bring the gospel where Christ had not been named.

Verse 10 – 'approved' in Christ; 'dokimos' – a metallurgical word, Apelles is true gold, fine gold!

Verse 13 – Rufus a choice man; not a chosen man, as some versions, for all Christians are chosen by God. But choice here means 'prime'; or as Bruce has it, 'eminent', or the French, 'elite'.

Outstanding, golden, eminent! Excellence!

This is the high calling to which every Christian is called.

We fail in so many ways; nevertheless, our failures do not define us – Christ does. And he who restored Peter restores you.

Are you thinking you are done? Maybe you are only starting out on the path of life in Christ, and already you are saying – ‘just enough is enough’.

Don’t do that. Think of the One who dwells in you? Reigns over you? Carries you every step? Look not to yourselves but to him!

How fitting the words of Paul to the Philippians:

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, Work Out Your Own Salvation With Fear And Trembling; ¹³ For It Is God Who Works In You Both To Will And To Do For *His* Good Pleasure. (Phi 2:12-13)

Next time, we will want to look more closely at one saint who is greeted here, as she really stands out. Phoebe needs to be understood better. Lord willing, next time!

Benediction:

⁹ Now may your love abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phi 1:9-11)

The Saints of Romans 16	Some Fun Facts*
Phoebe	A pagan name derived from Phoibos, a name of the god Apollo. From Cenchrea, one of the two harbors of Corinth
Prisca and Aquila	Best known here. Paul calls her Prisca, Luke calls her Priscilla (different forms). Aquila means 'eagle'. Prisca's name is first for some reason (spiritually more mature, socially superior, stronger personality have been adduced)
Epaenetus	Not first convert but first-fruit of First Missionary Journey
Mary	One of six in the NT who bear this name
Andronicus and Junias	Andronicus means 'man of victory'. Junia, feminine, a better rendering, as this is likely a husband and wife, who met Paul in Ephesus where they were in prison. 'Apostles' in the sense of opening new mission works in new fields.
Ampliatius	Common Roman name, especially in the Imperial circles
Urbanus	Means 'belonging to the urbs, city (Rome).
Apelles	A very common Jewish name, found frequently in Rome, including among the Imperial circle
Aristobulus	The family of this man is believed to have been willed over to Herod Agrippa 1 (Herod the Great's grandson), who lived as a private citizen under Claudius
Stachys	Means 'ear (of grain)'
Herodion	Connected to the Herod, with Aristobulus above
Narcissus	Some, including Calvin, identify him with Tiberius Claudius Narcissus, wealthy freedman of Emperor Tiberius, held great influence over Claudius, and executed early by Nero
Tryphaena and Tryphosa	Near relatives or sisters, possibly twins. The root of both is 'to live delicately, luxuriously'; 'Delicate' and 'Dainty'
Persis	Means 'Persian'; past tense labors may speak of her age
Rufus, his mother, and Paul's	Name means 'red'; common Latin and slave name. Possibly the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ, and who is found with Paul in Antioch (Acts 13:1)
Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren	Asyncritus, "incomparable"; Phlegon, "burning"; Hermes – named after the god of good luck, common slave name; Patrobas – Nero had a wealthy freedman by this name and later put to death by Galba; Hermas a very common name, a later Christian writer who wrote The Shepherd
Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister	Philologus, "fond of words"; Julia is the most common of female slave names. These two appear in Imperial circles. May be brother and sister, or husband and wife. Nereus is 'as old as Homer'; later tradition ties Nereus with Flavia Domitilla, a Christian lady of noble birth exiled by her uncle Domitian on the isle of Pandateria in 95AD (similar to the Apostle John)
Olympas	Abbr of Olympiadorus

*Ten are women, two are Jewish, some Latin, but mostly Greek. A diverse, heterogeneous group.