

**Message #56****Romans 16:1-16**

Many people spend their entire lives trying to become famous. They want people of this world to recognize them and honor them for something. Ralph Waldo Emerson was a poet, essayist, philosopher and lecturer who lived in the 1800's. He made a very interesting and accurate observation about people who are after fame—"fame is proof that people are gullible."

Romans 16 is an amazing chapter in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a book that was penned by the Apostle Paul. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles and the Apostle to the church.

There was no man on this earth more connected to God than Paul.

- 1) He had personally been visited by Jesus Christ Himself who made him an Apostle.
- 2) He had personally been taught the truth by Jesus Christ Himself for 3 years.
- 3) He had personally been caught up to the third heaven and had seen and heard amazing things.
- 4) He had personally been used by God to perform apostolic miracles with his own hands.
- 5) He had personally been used by God to write inspired Scripture.

In this world, Paul was considered to be nothing; but in God's world he was a giant. Now that reality never went to Paul's head. He never saw himself as being famous. He was a down to earth humble man of God.

It is clear from this text that he never became too big to associate with different kinds of people. It is amazing the memory he had of the people he knew. He had traveled all over the world and met all kinds of people and apparently many of them had ended up in Rome.

Paul appreciated these people. They had helped him and supported him and worked with him. When God's Spirit led him to bring Romans to a conclusion, he included a list of people who are forever famous because of their faith in Jesus Christ and their involvement with him.

A critical point to see here is this:

**PEOPLE WHO ARE FAITHFUL IN THE WORK OF GOD BY HELPING GOD'S MINISTER AND BY SERVING AND WORKING IN GOD'S CHURCH WILL BE FOREVER REMEMBERED AND HONORED.**

The people in this list, for the most part, were nobodies walking down the streets of Rome. But in the streets of heaven, these saints are forever remembered. **God knows them and Paul names them.**

Now there are 18 greetings in this section. There are two main cities which show up in this listing, which were probably the cities where Paul had met these people. The two cities are Corinth and Ephesus.

There are five common denominators of every person in this list:

- 1) Each person had his/her own unique background story.
- 2) Each person had responded to the Gospel of the Grace of God found in Jesus Christ.
- 3) Each person had been positively connected to Paul.
- 4) Each person had diligently worked hard in serving God.
- 5) Each person is forever remembered and is eternally famous.

Now Paul does not shy away from pointing out losers when he writes an inspired letter. For example, in II Timothy he names Phygelus, Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Demas and Alexander the coppersmith.

In Romans, Paul names spiritual winners and there are 18 specific greetings he gives. The total number of people that he names here is at least 27 people and he also includes but does not name the mother of Rufus (**16:13**) and the sister of Nereus (**16:15**) and several who worked with him. As near as we may decipher, he mentions ten women who were critical to him and his ministry and seventeen men who were critical to him and his ministry.

#### **GREETING #1** – The commendation of Phoebe. **16:1-2**

The name Phoebe is a pagan name and not a Biblical name. Phoebe is probably the one who actually carried Paul's letter to Rome. She was from Cenchrea which was very near Corinth. The distance from Corinth to Rome was nearly 750 miles. It would have been a dangerous and sacred assignment and Phoebe was one who was willing to do it.

Paul describes Phoebe in four ways:

- 1) She is a sister - she is a believer in Jesus Christ.
- 2) She is a servant - she was a servant in the sense of being an official deaconess.
- 3) She is a supporter - she supported and helped people.
- 4) She is a saint.

There are three things he wanted the church in Rome to do for Phoebe:

- 1) He wanted the church to commend her.
- 2) He wanted the church to receive her in a worthy way.
- 3) He wanted the church to help her with any need she had.

#### **GREETING #2** – The greeting to Aquila and Priscilla. **16:3-5a**

This was a husband and wife team who are mentioned six times in the New Testament. They are mentioned three times by Luke in Acts and they are mentioned three times by Paul in his letters. Aquila and Priscilla were not public, limelight people. They were not public speakers, but they were a faithful husband and wife team who did things for God.

They had a long association with Paul. They were business people who first met him in Corinth and gave him a job in their tent making business when he needed it (Acts 18:1-3).

They had travelled with Paul to Ephesus and even risked their own lives for Paul's ministry. In fact, Paul says here that "all" of the Gentile churches are indebted to this couple because Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles and they had done much for him.

Now one of the main features that continually show up with this couple is that they always had a church in their home. The early church often met in homes (Gal. 4:15; Philemon 2). Aquila and Priscilla had a church in their home in Ephesus (I Cor. 16:19) and they had one in Rome (**Rom. 16:5a**).

This couple loved God and they loved the word of God and they loved the Church of God. They were so well grounded in the word of God and Pauline teaching that when Apollos from Alexandria, Egypt, who was a powerful speaker, came to Ephesus and was confused in doctrine, these two straightened him out (Acts 18:24-26). They were well grounded in Pauline teaching.

They were willing to give their time, their home, their money, their ease and their lives for the work of God and for the ministry of Paul. Here Paul classifies them his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" and he does not use that term lightly.

On the streets of Rome, this couple would be unknowns, but on the streets of heaven, they are eternally famous.

### **GREETING #3** – The greeting to Epaenetus. **16:5b**

On Paul's third missionary journey, he traveled to Asia (Acts 19:10) and apparently one of the first converts to faith in Jesus Christ was a man named Epaenetus.

Paul calls him his "beloved" which means he had a special relationship with the Apostle Paul that was at the highest possible level. It was based on the fact that he was the first one to respond to the Grace Gospel and now 1-1 ½ years later, he was still faithful to the Lord and was now living in Rome.

### **GREETING #4** – The greeting to Mary. **16:6**

What we learn about Mary is that Mary was a very hard worker. In fact, the Greek word means that Mary was a woman who worked hard to the point of growing weary near exhaustion. Now Paul specifically brings out the fact that Mary "worked hard for you." By using the preposition "eis" it would seem that she had come "into" this church of Rome and had been a very hard worker in the church.

This was a woman who did not sit around eating bonbons. When there was work to be done, she did it. We don't even know what her work was. All we know is whatever she did, she was a hard worker.

**GREETING #5** – The greeting to Andronicus and Junias. **16:7**

There are five facts we learn here about these two:

- 1) They were Jewish believers like Paul - saved out of Law and into Grace.
- 2) They were at one time locked up in jail with Paul.
- 3) They were highly esteemed by the other Apostles.
- 4) They had been believers in Jesus Christ longer than Paul, which means over 22 years.
- 5) They were now living in Rome.

These were two older Jewish believers who had weathered the storms and were still going strong for God. They remained faithful to Grace, to God and to Paul. It is one thing to be faithful to God at church. It is another to be faithful to God sitting in jail with Paul.

**GREETING #6** – The greeting to Ampliatius. **16:8**

Paul had a deep love for this man solely based on his faith and work in the Lord. Here is the real basis for Christian fellowship and love.

**GREETING #7** – The greeting to Urbanus and Stachys. **16:9**

These were two men Paul loved who had helped him in the work of God.

**GREETING #8** – The greeting to Apelles. **16:10a**

Apelles was one approved in Christ. The word “approved” means that he had been tested and found to be faithful and pure. Apparently he had gone through a major test for his faith and had stayed the course. He did not waver and now he is forever remembered.

**GREETING #9** – The greeting to the household of Aristobulus. **16:10**

According to history, there is an Aristobulus who was the grandson of Herod the Great. If this is the same individual, then Paul’s ministry had impacted some people in high places.

We must not ever underestimate the power of God in being able to impact people.

**GREETING #10** – The greeting to Herodian. **16:11a**

Herodian is clearly in the line of Herod. He must have been a Jewish believer. In I Corinthians 1:26 we read “Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called.” But the text does not say “not any” are called. Some are called and Herodian was one who was called.

**GREETING #11** – The greeting to the household of Narcissus. **16:11b**

According to history, Narcissus had been the secretary to Claudius. He made a fortune by taking bribe money to pass on personal requests to Claudius when he was Caesar. When Claudius was murdered and Nero came to power, Narcissus stayed in Rome for a time and then committed suicide. Apparently some in his family had come to faith in Jesus Christ and were very faithful in the church of Rome.

Paul is no name dropper. He could have begun his list with the big names Aristobulus, Herodian and Narcissus. However, he started with Phoebe, a faithful woman, and eleven others before he even names them. God is no respecter of persons and neither was Paul. If a person loved God and loved the word of God and had responded to Paul's apostolic teaching and were faithful in the church, that meant much to him and to God and he named them.

**GREETING #12** – The greeting to Tryphaena and Tryphosa. **16:12a**

We know nothing about these two ladies. It is speculated in view of their names that they were twin sisters. What we do know is that they were workers. They worked hard in the church even to the point of getting tired and exhausted. What we do know is that these were two very faithful hard working women in the church of Rome, whose names are remembered forever by Paul and by God.

**GREETING #13** – The greeting to Persis. **16:12b**

Persis may have been a woman from Persia. What we know about her is that everyone loved her and she also was a very hard worker in the church. The same word for “work hard” is used here and is used for the two ladies. The difference is the tense. The aorist tense is used here for Persis. What that probably means is Persis was older and could not serve with the same level of intensity anymore. She could not serve at the same hard working level she used to, but everyone in the church loved her. She had earned a good name for herself.

**GREETING #14** – The greeting to Rufus. **16:13**

According to Mark 15:21, the person who carried the cross of Jesus Christ was Simon of Cyrene (North Africa). Simon had two sons—Alexander and Rufus.

It is possible that this Rufus was the son of the man who actually carried the cross of Jesus Christ. It is also possible that Alexander, his brother, is the one who calmed down the crowd at Ephesus (Acts 19:33) and the one who did Paul much harm later in life (I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 4:14).

Paul specifically brings out the fact that Rufus was chosen by God. The implication is that Rufus had been elected by God and so had his mother, but Alexander is not mentioned and may not have been saved or he may have already been dead.

In fact, Paul says that Rufus' mother was like his own mother. She obviously took care of Paul. It may be that she sided with Paul against Alexander.

**GREETING #15** – The greeting to the first group. **16:14**

What we know about this list of names is that they were all in the family of God and all connected to the church of Rome. We may not know much about them but God did and he wanted them named.

**GREETING #16** – The greeting to the second group. **16:15**

This second group was similar to the first. There are a couple of ladies listed in this listing, which clearly shows that there were faithful men and women.

**GREETING #17** – The greeting to all. **16:16a**

Paul wanted the believers to greet with a holy kiss. This is referred to in I Corinthians 16:20; I Thessalonians 5:25 and I Peter 5:14.

It was a kiss on the forehead or cheek that expressed common love and unity. This was not what we would call a romantic type of kiss, but an expression of love and unity. This kiss was practiced until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and then seems to have disappeared from the church.

It is a wonderful thing to see believers shake hands and hug each other. There is nothing wrong with showing that we are united with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is good, clean and honors God.

**GREETING #18** – The greeting from all the churches. **16:16b**

Paul ends this greeting section by saying all the churches greet you. Carefully notice how he qualifies the church. They are not churches of a city or a denomination, they are churches of Christ. What we have in this church are faithful men and women who believed in Jesus Christ, who loved the word of God and they loved Paul. They were hard workers.

The women were Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junias, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, Rufus' mother and Nereus' sister. So in this church of Rome there was a good combination of faithful women and faithful men. They loved Jesus Christ. They loved the Grace teaching of Paul and they loved Paul.

These may not be big names in the world, but they were to God and one day we will have the privilege of meeting every one of these brothers and sisters who obviously were instrumental in us having Romans.