

GOD'S PEOPLE, SAVED by FAITH and SENT with the GOSPEL.

Romans 16:1-27 Portions adapted from "Making Connections", by Tom Fuller, @ SermonCentral.Com.

"You know you've made it, when your friends tell their friends that you are their friend." (Mokokoma Mokhonoana – South African philosopher, social critic, aphorist).

For some, Paul's greetings at the end of Romans might seem boring and not relevant, but to the contrary, Paul's friendships and workings with other believers offers us a rich tapestry of life and service in the 1st century church. It also teaches us one last profound truth: That at its most essential core, the Church is simply GOD'S PEOPLE, saved by FAITH and SENT With the GOSPEL.

Paul's letter to the Romans was not merely a theological treatise on God's plan to rescue humanity from our sins. He wrote it to **people**; but people he had (mostly) never met, in a city where he had never been. The purpose of his letter was that of introduction. ***"Hi, I'm Paul, and this is what I believe which can also give you hope and strength in your faith."*** In addition, it was a letter of request. As we saw in the last chapter, Paul hoped *"to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you"* (Rom 15:24). Paul wanted to use Rome as his new base of operations for missions to areas where he'd not yet been. It didn't work out quite that way. While Paul was in Jerusalem, he was arrested and ended up in Rome alright, but in chains. In this letter, he had urged the church to pray that he might be *"rescued from the unbelievers in Judaea"* (15:31). And he was, just not in the way he expected; which is how God often works. Tradition tells us that Paul was eventually released from Roman prison and that he indeed made his mission trip to Spain before returning to Rome and being beheaded by Caesar Nero.

This closing chapter was really an important part of his self-introduction; you might say it was his list of character references. Paul wants the Romans to know that he really is no stranger to them. That he and his fellow workers in Corinth have long held deep relationships with the church in Rome—a church made up of Jews, Gentiles, Roman officials, slaves, free people, men, and women. So even though this last chapter isn't heavy on theology, it is filled with personal testimony and feeling, and gives us a rich picture of ministry and body life in the 1st century—something that can encourage us in the 21st century church.

Chapter 16 opens with Paul asking a favor for a friend, **Phoebe**, who was apparently about to leave Corinth for Rome. It was customary for letters of introduction to accompany people going from one city to another. Phoebe was a "minister" from the church at Cenchræe, a city about 7 miles from Corinth. Paul wanted the Romans to recognize her as such and thus support whatever task she was currently about.

Here are some important clues about Phoebe: She was a probably a wealthy businesswoman who personally and financially supported both Paul's and other missionary's ministries. Paul titles her a "**diakonos**" in her church, which translates for us as "deacon." But that position held far more weight in his day than it does in ours. Paul often referred to himself, Timothy, and other fellow missionaries as "Deacons of the Church," meaning that Phoebe was not just a deliverer of hot apple pies to shut-ins, but was a Church certified preacher of the Gospel (just like the Deacons Philip and Stephen in Jerusalem). And Phoebe was likely the person who brought his letter to Rome. Imagine that, a woman was entrusted to deliver Paul's most important message to the church.

In fact, it interesting to note here, that of the 28 "shout-outs" that Paul gives in this chapter, he mentions 9 women by name and identifies 6 of them along with 6 other men as being important workers in the Church.

He also lists two missionary couples: Priscilla and Aquila (her name coming first indicating that she was the leader of the pair), and Andronicus & Junia to whom he gives the title "Apostles" (more on them later). So for a man often libeled as a narrow-minded woman hater, Paul seems to have a lot of respect for and affection towards many women who have labored both for and with him in Christian ministry.

Also, with the exception of a couple of city officials, most of the names that Paul lists were more common among slaves and the working classes. When you think about it, as Paul noted in his Corinthian letter, the early church flourished and grew in the Roman world because it was mostly carried forward by common, good hearted, brave, blue collar workers; men and women alike.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:
not many of you were wise by human standards,
not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth...
in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts,
boast in the Lord.' 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. **He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness***

and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

The early church triumphed because of fishermen, merchants, trades people, and slaves who could easily move through the understorey of the culture. Male or female, slave or free, single women and mothers, all had a vital part in ministry within the body of Christ; it was common everyday people who conquered the Roman world for Jesus Christ. So let's get to meet a few of them.

Priscilla (Prisca) and **Aquila** were fellow tent makers (having the same profession as Paul), but they were also apparently an independent self-appointed missionary couple who reached out to Paul in a particularly low time of his ministry (Acts 18). They were from Rome, had come to Corinth, went with Paul to Ephesus, and eventually returned to Rome. They "*risked their necks*" for Paul's life, probably in the riot that broke out in Ephesus (Acts 19). They were natural church planters, and apparently one of the churches in Rome was in their home. This is a great example of husband and wife teams in ministry.

Verses 5 and 6 mention **Epaenetus** — the first convert of Paul's ministry in Asia (no wonder he was thought of so fondly) and Mary – which is a Jewish name. We don't know what Mary did, but she was known as a very hard worker for the church. **It's not what we do for God that matters, but that we do it faithfully and fully.**

Verse 7, mentions the couple **Andronicus** and **Junia** who were most likely fellow missionaries with Paul, not actual relatives. And like Paul, they had been imprisoned as a result of their missionary work. Being imprisoned, even being killed because of your testimony for Jesus is as old as the Church itself; dating all the way back to John the Baptizer, Stephen the deacon, James the brother of John, and countless other martyrs throughout history. So **Andrew Brunson**, the jailed pastor in Turkey is just the latest addition to a long and heroic list of Christians who have and continue to preach the Gospel from behind bars. There are also an estimated 90 Christians currently imprisoned in Iran because of their witness to Jesus Christ.

Paul's reference to Andronicus and Junia being "*in Christ before me,*" indicates that he looked up to them as leaders in the faith. They have also long given the medieval and later Church difficulties, because Paul describes them as "*prominent among the apostles.*" Now remember that "apostle" literally means "sent one." Jesus originally appointed 12 apostles, after which he appointed Paul as an "Apostle to the Gentiles." Apparently the Church was now also sending out "apostles" missionaries specifically ordained to take the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. Nothing more is known about this

couple other than they worked with Paul, they were loved by Paul, and approved by the Lord. In the end, what more could we ask for?

Verses 8-9 name: **Ampliatius, Urbanis,** and **Stachys**: these were all common slave names. Paul calls them beloved co-workers.

In verse 10, we know nothing more about **Apelles**, except that Paul describes him as “*approved in Christ*,” that divine endorsement of his ministry was one Paul also claimed for himself and urged on his young disciple Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:4, 2 Timothy 2:15). Since both Paul and Timothy ministered under frequent criticism and out of questionable backgrounds – Paul formerly persecuted the church and Timothy was a half-breed – I wonder if Apelles might be another Christian leader who has thrived under criticism. **Who needs worry about human approval when you have Christ’s.**

In verses 10-11, Paul next greets the house staff of three notable Roman families. **Herodion** was among the Jewish nobility living in Rome and a believer. **Aristobulus** and **Narcissus** were two prominent Roman citizens who either did not share the faith of their staff, or they had previously died.

Next Paul greets three women: two sisters, possibly twins who were named **Delicate** and **Dainty** at birth, and another woman known only as **Persia** (or the Persian). Again these three women were not known for anything in particular, but they were known for their hard work in the faith and also for being beloved by their fellow workers. That would actually make a nice tombstone epithet: *Here lies John, just a common man but a hard worker for Christ and loved by all.*

Verse 13 names **Rufus** and his mother, *who was a mother to me also*. Rufus’ “chosen” status was probably in being the son of Simon of Cyrene, the Jerusalem tourist who being in the wrong place at the wrong time, was compelled by the soldiers to carry Jesus’ cross beam up to Golgotha hill (Mark 15:21). That walk with Jesus must have deeply impacted Simon for him to raise his son up as a believer in the capital city of the very people who had officially killed the Messiah.

Apparently **Rufus’ mother** must have decided that Paul also needed some “mothering” and took it upon herself to do so. Paul was grateful for her attention.

Finally in verses 14-15, Paul greets two house churches. Once again their names **Asyncritus, Philologus** (et.al.) indicating that these communities of faith were comprised mostly of slaves, and trades people living in various parts of the city.

It is this spread out nature of the house churches in Rome, which now caused Paul to give them one more warning away from anyone who caused divisions within the body or who became a stumbling block for other Christians. Paul's remedy being that if they stayed obedient to the Word of God, wise in regard of what's good and innocent of any evil then they would know who was who and God could continue to use them to crush Satan underfoot.

Finally Paul's traveling companions got to add their own personal greetings: **Timothy**, of course, was Paul's most trusted disciple, and troubleshooter who went on to be the pastor of the Ephesus Church.

Lucius is a Roman form of the Greek name Luke; so this could have been Paul's traveling Doctor friend. But there was also a **Lucius of Cyrene** who was among the prophets and teachers in Antioch who first appointed Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. It would be nice to think that this was the Lucius who was still traveling with Paul (as well as Dr. Luke).

Jason and Sosipater were relatives traveling with Paul; so not all of Paul's family had rejected him for his new found faith.

Gaius, was a prominent and wealthy citizen of Corinth whose home hosted Paul, a house church, and according to John's third letter countless other Christian missionaries coming through town. He had also apparently traveled some with Paul and had almost lost his life in **Ephesus** during the riots provoked by the silversmiths' opposition to Paul's preaching (Acts 19:23-40). Paul apparently had many friends who had stuck with him even through the worst of times.

Out of all these people, **Erastus**, the Treasurer of Corinth, is the only named city official ... see some politicians do find their way into God's kingdom.

Tertius, Paul's Scribe, and **Quartus** were two more slaves (literally "Number 3" & "Number 4"). Many Roman slaves were never named, only numbered. Paul called them "brothers."

And finally with verses 25-27 Paul gives a benediction in his own hand (proof that the letter was not a forgery). Doesn't this sum up the book nicely?

- It's all about glorifying God
- and being strengthened by our knowledge of the gospel.
- That Jesus has always been the focal point of all history. And while this wasn't known clearly before, now it is here for all to see (even the prophets struggled to understand the Messianic prophecies they wrote: 1 Peter 1:10-12).

- No “new” revelation is needed.
- No other savior is necessary.
- By God’s command this Good News about Jesus has now gone out to the whole world calling all people to come to faith Christ their savior.
- To God be the glory through Jesus Christ—forever!

So what conclusions should we draw from this grocery list of people and events in the life of Paul and the early Christian Church.

[that] there is no longer Jew or Greek,
 there is no longer slave or free,
 there is no longer male and female;
 for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
 Galatians 3:28

1. **That there are no insignificant people in the church.** Male or female, slave or free, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, no matter even your questionable background. As a member of God’s family we are a vital part of the body-of-Christ. **We are “one in Christ:”** loved, respected, and needed. Wives, mothers, sisters, brothers, even cousins, we all perform valuable service to the Lord.
2. **Get Connected** What I love about this chapter is that people were not just notches on Paul’s Christian Conversion Belt; Throughout his journeys Paul connected with everyone from every strata of life. He got to know them well and became passionate friends; and they apparently did the same for him. One of the chief blessings of the body of Christ is that we have the opportunity to get to know some wonderful people—take advantage of it. Don’t be disconnected, but connect to others.
3. **Show Appreciation** Did you notice how many times Paul commends the hard work, and service of those he knew? Paul could have focused simply on what God had done through him, but he takes the time to really appreciate the good things his friends are doing. I know this sounds somewhat simplistic, but let’s make it a point to appreciate those people around us.
4. **Remain Watchful** This might also seem obvious. In chapter 15 Paul had told the Romans they were “filled with knowledge and able to instruct one another.” (15:14), yet he still gives them this exhortation to “watch out.” Connecting with

people and showing appreciation has to go side by side with sound doctrine; otherwise the "smooth talkers" can please their way in.

5. **Be Thankful** Through it all, let's continually give thanks to the one who, through His mercy, has brought us from a terrible darkness into a marvelous light!

Romans is indeed the good news of God's salvation offered to all who will receive it

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
Romans 3:22-24

It is very good news for those of us who know that there is a God who is absolutely holy and that we can have a relationship with him because our sin is a barrier to fellowship with God. In his mercy God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to this world. He lived a perfect, sinless life. He eventually went to the cross to pay the penalty for all sinners such as ourselves.

The way we come into a right relationship with God is by acknowledging our sin before God, believing that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, and by faith accepting his offered gift of salvation.

And the way we know that we have come into that right relationship with God is that our lives will be completely transformed as we climb out of the world's mold, renewing our minds through our growing knowledge of God's word and our life lived within the body of Christ. As we gratefully offer our lives back to God, as a living sacrifice, only then will we learn how good, acceptable, and perfect God's will for our lives has been.

As we now approach the communion table to remember again the price paid for our salvation, let us celebrate with joy the privilege and hope we now have to be called a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ.