

Romans 16:1-16
“The Family Album” (part A)

I. Intro

II. Vs. 1-16 Friends to greet

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The 16th chapter of Romans is not an insignificant relic of the past; names that are easier to forget than they are difficult to pronounce! Instead it is a chapter of the future not the past, a testimony that what matters most in this life is not our possessions or positions but our friendships which is all of this life that will remain and pass into eternity. What we have in this chapter is not a mere list of names, but a testimony of what God does in lives that will last forever. A quick peek into the “*Family Album*” which is a true representation of heaven as we gather around the throne of God Who alone has made our enduring love and friendship possible.

Behind every name is a story and the ones listed here would make up a “*love story*” as these are all folks that God loved and loved God. The story is in their transformation and how God was now using them to love others in making new friends. Many of these names and their stories will have to wait as we don’t know much of them, but we will one day. Of the 24 specific names mentioned six are women which is interesting concerning the fact Paul is often maligned for what many perceive as his disregard for women in authority. I suggest that if you want to know what Paul thought of women you only need to read this chapter to see that he valued them as equals in serving Jesus and verbally shows his appreciation for all they do. Three times (verses 6, 12) Paul says that these ladies “*labored*” and he chooses a word in the Greek that means “*to work to the point of exhaustion*”. Two of these names mean “*dainty*” and “*delicate*” but Paul says that these two aristocrats had developed a habit in Christ of working until they just couldn’t do another thing. Of those 24 specific names 13 occur in inscriptions on official

documents in the Emperor's palace in Rome. This is interesting because of what Paul wrote in Philip. 4:22 that, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." Christianity had penetrated the imperial palace of the world empire in less than 70 years, and it had done so on the back of friendship.

II. Vs. 1-16 Friends to greet

Paul was a friend maker and because of this he was a soul-winner! As Paul recollected their names he sent them a message of love which has become embalmed in the Holy Scriptures. Spurgeon once said, "It is better to be God's dog than to be the devil's darling." God loves multiplication and in the words of "Three Dog Night" "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do". This chapter divides into three sections of which we will only look at the first part of it this morning:

- a. **Vs. 1-16 Some friends to greet:** The first list found in verses 1-16 is of those folks that Paul was sending a greeting too.
- b. **Vs. 17-20 Some foes to avoid:** Sandwiched between these two lists (verses 17-20) is people to avoid so that their obedience can continue to be known to all.
- c. **Vs. 21-24 Some friends to thank:** The 2nd list found in verses 21-23 is a list of those he was sending a greeting from while he was in Corinth.

Of the 33 names mentioned our eluded too:

- **Nine of them were with Paul:** Eight men and one woman
- **Twenty-four of them were in Rome:** Seventeen men and seven women
- **Two households are mentioned:** As well as two unnamed women the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus, as well as some unnamed men

Vs. 1-2 The letter was carried by a traveling businesswoman named “*Phoebe*” and the Church through history ought to be grateful to this faithful servant who traveled from Corinth to Rome carrying this precious letter. Paul tells us that she was from the seaport of Cenchrea about 9 miles from the city of Corinth. Her name “Phoebe” is the feminine form of a title given to the pagan god Apollo and meant “*the bright one*” and she certainly seemed to fit her name (*this would make her a Gentile not Jewish*). Phoebe was on her way to Rome and the fact that we are reading this letter suggests that Paul’s commendation was well founded. This was a faithful lady who obviously could be entrusted with a very important task. There is an indication in the language here that she labored spreading the gospel and teaching the Word as did Paul as he describes her as a helper of many.

Vs. 3-5a Paul turns his greetings to a wonderful couple that we know quite a bit about Priscilla and her husband Aquila. Their names are mentioned some 6 times in the scriptures and four of those times Priscilla’s name is mentioned first, which indicates that she had a more visible role in ministry then did her supporting husband. Paul says that they risked their lives for him and that may be a reference to the riots that broke out in Ephesus mentioned in Acts 19. They also had a church in their house as the first 300 years of the Church there were no buildings as we have now.

Vs. 5b-6 “*Epaenetus*” was the first believer led to the Lord when Paul came to Asia which capital was Ephesus located in modern day Turkey.

Mary recorded here seems to be associated with him and Paul distinguishes her by what she did among them saying that she labored or toiled among them. There are 6 Mary’s in the bible, and you usually think of Jesus’ mom or Mary of Bethany the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Yet all we know of this Mary is that she is a worker and the word used means to sweat. Think of

that: *This gal joins a list of Mary's because she was willing to break a sweat for Jesus!* Oh saints don't you see that *notoriety isn't in what we do it's in how we do it and Who we do it for!*

Vs. 7-10a Some see "Andronicus" and "Junias" as relatives of Paul be that as it may, he does say that they shared other things in common as they were "fellow prisoners" and were known among the leadership of the Church. What I find of further interest is Paul's words saying that they were saved before he was. They predated his conversion, and no doubt knew him when he was "Saul of Tarsus" persecuting the Church in Jerusalem and consenting to the death of Stephen. Imagine what encouragement these two were to Paul as they could see his progression in Christ. They could testify of his heart and love for people as they shared a cell with him. They were well regarded among the apostles, having become Christians sometime in the first three or four years after Pentecost. The idea that Andronicus and Junia are apostles themselves (though not of the twelve), is in the sense of being *special emissaries of God*, not in the sense of being of the twelve.

"Amplias" (verse 8) is an interesting name as they have found a single tomb in the Domitilla cemetery in the catacombs in Rome with this very name. The single name infers that he was a slave but yet the tomb is very ornate which suggests that he was a Christian and highly regarded in the Church in Rome. We know nothing of "Urbanus" and "Stachys" (verse 9) other than what is recorded here that they were loved, and Paul appreciated his work. "Apelles" (verse 10), name means "Called" and Paul says he was, "approved in Christ". The word approved means to "endure testing, to withstand the pressure". Oh dear ones **that us what our calling ought to signify that we have endured the testing of our faith, withstood the pressures of life all because we have found our home in the Lord.** In Psalm 61:3 we read that God has

“*been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy*”, that is what “*Apelles*” had proven by his life!

Vs.10b-11 Also mentioned by Paul is some Christians that had risen to high places within the Roman government. “*Aristobulus*” (verse 10) was the great-grandson of King Herod the Great who killed all the Jewish males 2 years and under in Bethlehem seeking to kill Jesus. He killed his children, his wives and anyone else that was a threat to his power. Yet with that said the servants of his great grandson are named among the believers in Rome! Aristobulus had been a close friend of Emperor Claudius and it seems some from his household had become believers and upon his death it is reported that they became property of the emperor. In connection to this household of servants Paul also sends a greeting out to “*Herodion*” (verse 11a) who he calls a relative an indication that Paul had a family connection to the ruling family of Jews. ***Friends don't worry about the fact that you come from dysfunction family God does His most amazing work in the garden's full of dirt!***

“*Narcissus*” (verse 11b) is another name that pops in ancient Roman history as he was the housekeeper for Flavius Clemens who became the consul of Rome the highest political office of the city. Flavius was condemned to death by the Emperor Domitian in 95 AD some 35 years after this letter. He was put to death because he was a Christian and his wife Domatilla who was also a believer was banished Island of Pontia. What this seems to indicate is that Roman society had already been infiltrated by the Lord through believing servants who lived in such a way that their masters became followers of Jesus.

The interesting twist to this story is that Flavius Clemens was the son of Flavius Sabinus who had been Nero's consul when Nero had ordered him to persecute Christians charging them with the fires which almost burned Rome to the ground in 64 A.D. Nero had ordered him to roll

believers in pitch and set them on fire making them human torches. Could it be that 30 years earlier the young Flavius Clemens had witnessed the courage of these Christians at the hands of the brutality of his father and the influence of a young “*Narcissus*” became a follower of Jesus himself?

Vs. 12 The names of “*Tryphena*” and “*Tryphosa*” suggest nobility as their names mean “*dainty*” and “*delicate*” yet in Christ they had become hard workers. *Think of that a moment as Jesus can take a person born in slavery and make them royalty and he can take one born to nobility and make them even greater royalty by making them His servants.* “*Persis*” (verses 12b) was yet another woman who served whom Paul calls “*the darling*” she must have been a sweetheart in her service to others.

Vs. 13 Rufus perhaps is the same one spoken of in Mark 15:21 and if so his father was Simon the Cyrene who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus on that first Good Friday as he was there to celebrate the pass over.

Vs.14 It seems here in these five names as well as those not mentioned is a group of young Greek businessmen that had come to Rome and started a home church at their place. I love that When folks that share something in common band together to share Someone in common pooling their time, talent, and treasure to impact their communities!

Vs. 15-16 Here again is another group that most likely made up a house church: “*Philologus*” (verse 15) was probably a nick name as it means “*lover of the Word*” and he gathered together with these men and women to “*love each other*” because they loved the Word!

Of the rest of these names, Paul finds something wonderful to say about almost every one of them - noting their labor, his special regard for them (beloved), their standing in the Lord (approved in Christ . . . in the Lord . . . chosen in the Lord). It shows Paul's generous way of paying compliments in a way meant to build up God's people. In Luke 7:45 we are told that the common greeting was a kiss. Based upon a comment from Clement of Alexandria it seems that this practice was later abused.