

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14

LESSON 55 – PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE – Romans 16:3-16

In this lesson we meet some members of the church in Rome who held a special place in Paul's heart.

In his commentary on Romans, Warren Wiersbe writes this, "In my own reading of Christian biography, I have discovered that the servants whom Christ has used the most were people who could make friends. They multiplied themselves in the lives of their friends and associates in the ministry. While there may be a place for the secluded saint who lives alone with God, it is my conviction that most of us need each other. We are sheep and sheep flock together."

Paul was definitely a person who could make friends and we see that here in Romans 16. In our remaining three lessons, we are going to go verse by verse through this list of people that Paul references.

Verses 3-5

Priscilla and Aquila were a Jewish husband and wife team Paul met on his first visit to Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). They are mentioned six times in the New Testament. They were a committed, powerful couple in the Lord's service. They took Paul into their home, took Apollos into their home and instructed him, and then started a church in their home in Ephesus. House churches were the norm in that day since building weren't available and large assemblies were not allowed in the Roman Empire. Paul's statement in verse 4 is significant, "They risked their lives for me." Unfortunately, we have no information about how they risked their lives.

Paul also sends greetings to Epenetus, "the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia." This man was undoubtedly special to Paul since he addressed him as, "my dear friend."

Verse 6

The next person Paul greets is a woman named Mary. The only thing we know about her is that she "worked very hard." The word translated worked here means to labor to the point of exhaustion. Whoever she was, she received a greeting from Paul because of her sacrificial work.

Verse 7

There are many Bible scholars who believe Andronicus and Junia were relatives of Paul. If this is true, Paul would have had double joy in greeting members of his family who were also Christians. These two were also fellow prisoners of Paul, but we don't know where. These two were also "outstanding among the apostles." Perhaps they had been in Jerusalem and had known the other apostles before moving to Rome.

Verse 8

Ampliatus is known to have been a slave name in Rome. So here we probably have a Roman slave who had been saved.

Verse 9

Here we meet two more men, Urbanus...a Roman name...and Stachys...a Greek name. We know nothing more about these men.

Verse 10

First, Paul greets a man named Apelles whose faith has “stood the test.” Aristobulus, whose household is greeted, may have been the brother of Herod Agripp I. If that’s true, it shows clearly that the body of Christ is a mix of people...all races, ages, social standings and backgrounds.

Verse 11

Herodion was mentioned earlier and is a fellow Jew. Narcissus, according to some Bible scholars, was the secretary to the Emperor Claudius.

Verse 12

Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis are all women. The first two were twin sisters who labored faithfully in the Lord’s work. Persis was probably the older sister of the first two. Three women in the same family...all serving the Lord.

Verse 13

Here we meet someone we know a bit more about. In Mark 15:21, we find a man named Simon who carried the cross of Jesus to Golgotha...and one of his sons named Rufus. Scholars are pretty confident that the person mentioned here in Romans 16 is the same Rufus mentioned in Mark.

Verse 14

Of the group of people named here in verse 14, we know nothing. They must have shared something in common since they are mentioned together.

Verse 15

Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas are essentially lost to history since we know nothing about them. One not about Philologus... His name literally means chatterbox. Whether there’s any significance to his name or not...we don’t know.

Verse 16

Paul finishes these greetings with the instruction to “greet one another with a holy kiss.” The kiss of greeting was a common demonstration of affection in Paul’s day. It had the same general place in that culture that shaking hands or a hug does in ours. The New Testament church was much more of a family for Christians then than it is now because converts were often cast out of their own families...especially Jewish converts.

From this look at the individuals Paul greets here in this part of chapter 16, here are some applications for our lives today...

The Place of the Home in the Early Church

The word "church" doesn't appear in Romans until you get to chapter 16...where it refers primarily to churches that met in houses. House churches played an important role in the spread of the Gospel.

The Priority of Service in the Early Church

Reading these verses, you can't help but notice the number of references Paul makes to service. At least seven of the people Paul greets are commended for their service. The church in Rome was a working church. Coming from Paul...a man who never stopped working for the Lord...these commendations for service are not surprising.

The Power of Encouragement in the Early Church

Did you notice in these verses how Paul dropped little words of encouragement to those he greeted? Just little words, but so meaningful to those they reference. They knew they had a special place in Paul's heart.

The Picture of Unity in the Early Church

The picture we get from the people Paul greets is diversity and the resulting implication is unity. How did such a diverse group of people exist as one? What held them together? Well...the reality is that is not what but Who. At least a dozen times in these verses Christ is mentioned. Jesus is the unifying force in His church. Regardless of our differences, we CAN be one in Him.