

# The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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## **Continued Greetings**

As Paul comes to the end of the book of Romans, he concludes it with a list of names that is rather long. In fact, there are 35 names mentioned in these verses. He also addresses two different households and at least three churches, very possibly, the households are house churches as well. Behind every name, there is a special story. In every life, there is a something that makes that person special to God.

### *A Special Salute to All the Saints*

I think it would be fair to say that Paul loved these people and they were very special to him. He opened this letter with the words, Romans 1:9, “without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” When we pray for people, those people become special to us. We develop a special relationship to them and with them.

In 2 Cor 11:28, Paul speaks of the daily concern he had for all the churches. The word "*care*" means, "*to experience anxiety*." Paul cared very much for these people and they became special to him. Paul was always asking the church to pray for him and what he was doing. Why did he feel he needed their prayers and support if he had the Holy Spirit dwelling with him?

Perhaps, he realized that the burden of the church couldn't be borne by one man alone. It is very unhealthy for one person to become convinced that he is supposed to bear the load of the church alone. (cf., *Moses* - Numbers

11:14). Paul is addressing a group of people who did share the load of the responsibilities of the church with Paul.

In 16:9 Paul calls Urba'nus a "fellow workers." Other fellow workers he mentions in his letters are **Timothy** (Rom 16:21); **Titus** (2 Cor 8:23); **Epaphrodi'tus** (Phil 2:25); **Eu o'dia**, **Syn'tyche**, and **Clement** (Phil 4:2-3); **Aristar'chus**, **Mark**, and **Ie'sous/Justus** (Col 4:10-11); **Philemon** (Philemon 1); and **Mark**, **Aristar'chus** again, **Demas**, and **Luke** (Philemon 24).

"Fellow workers" is *sunergos*, the Greek word from which we get the English word "synergy" - the interaction or working together of two or more agents or forces, producing a combined effect greater than the sum of their individual effects. This word is repeated over and over again in this chapter (cf., *sunergos* in Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 1:24; 8:23; Phil 2:25, 4:3; Col 4:11; 1Thess 3:2; and Phil 1:1, 24).

### ***There Was a Good Bit of Diversity within this Group***

As one reads these verses, it quickly becomes evident that this is a diverse group of people. There are men and women, Jews, Romans, Greeks, and Persian. There are households and house churches mentioned; no doubt, there were those who are wealthy and those who are poor.

As Paul mentions these names, one can almost see him visualizing them one by one. In verse 16 he says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was the accepted method of greeting in those days. In our day we shake hands or hug one another. Paul could not do this himself, so he mentions their names and says something special about each.

### ***Greet My Beloved Epaene'tus, Who Is the First Fruit of Achaia to Christ***

"First fruit" is related to the Jewish term that refers to that which is set apart to God. Under the Law Israel was to bring the first fruits of the grain to the Lord, acknowledging that all produce was his. Paul utilizes the metaphor of first fruits on other occasions to speak of his first converts in a region, he calls them the "first fruits" (e.g., the first fruit of Achaia in 1Cor 16:15). Epaene'tus was the first from Asia who became part of Paul's "offering of the Gentiles" to the Lord (Rom 15:16). Here was the first convert that Paul

won to Christ in the province of Asia, where the city of Ephesus is located, and he never forgot him.

***Greet Mary Who Labored Much for Us***

There are a number of women named “Mary” (*Mari’an*) in the NT. The prominence of women’s names in this chapter emphasizes their wide sphere of influence in the early church. It is also of note that in addition to Mary, Paul places emphasis on labors performed by three other women – Tryphe’na, Trypho’sa and Per’sis. Paul gives Mary a very strong compliment when he says she “worked very hard for you.”

***Greet Androni’cus and Juni’a, My Countrymen  
and My Fellow Prisoners, Who Are of Note among the Apostles,  
Who also Were in Christ before Me***

Although "kinsman" normally refers to blood relatives, it can be extended to include fellow countrymen and in the context of this epistle probably refers to fellow Jews who are in Christ (cf., "kinsman" in Rom 9:3). These kinsmen were at some time in prison with Paul or were imprisoned as was Paul, (Col 4:10, Philemon 23). Because Juni’as may be a woman’s name, these two might have been husband and wife.

"They are of note" is *episemos*, which literally means, "having a mark upon" and was used literally to describe money that had been stamped or coined (with a mark). Here Paul uses it for those who are well-thought-of, outstanding, or distinguished in some way.

"They were ‘in Christ’ before me." Androni’cus and Juni’as" had become Christians before he did. Those in Christ before Paul were very likely Jewish Christians from Jerusalem or somewhere in Palestine, or Jews of the Diaspora who were in Jerusalem on the Pentecost of Acts 2.

The phrase “who are of note among the apostles,” implies that they had distinguished themselves among the apostles. This interpretation is supported by Paul’s remark that these two believers were “in Christ” before him. At the time of Paul’s conversion, most Christians were still living in or near Judea in Palestine. If these two Jewish kinsmen were converted before Paul, it is possible that they lived in Jerusalem and performed their outstanding service among the apostles in that city.

***Greet Ampli'as, My Beloved In The Lord***

Epaene'tus (v 5), Ampli'as (v 8), Sta'chys (v 9), and Persis (v 12), whose name means "Persian," were all called *agapeton* by Paul. They are ones Paul viewed in the light of *agape* – ones who are the objects of *agape* (*agapeton*).

***Greet Urba'nus, Our Fellow Worker in Christ,  
and Sta'chus, My Beloved***

Here again Paul speaks of one of his fellow workers (*sunergon*), a colleague in the service of Christ, and another who is distinguished by the word "agape/agapeton."

***Greet Apell'es, Approved in Christ***

"Approved" (*dokimos*) was used to describe something that has been tested, as gold or silver is tested and proven genuine. Apell'es may have undergone some crisis situation and had proven himself faithful, or he may have had a faith or moral crisis he had undergone and had conquered.

***Greet Those Who Are of the Household of Aristobul'us,  
Greet Hero'dion, My Countryman, Greet Those Who Are of the  
Household of Narcis'sus Who Are in the Lord***

A "household" would have most likely been all the members of Aristobul'us' family, in addition to his servants, making it possible that a house church met in his home. So also with Narcissus' household and both are designated as those who are "in the Lord."

The phrases "in Christ," or "in the Lord," are repeated in ten occurrences in these 26 verses (e.g., Rom 16:2, 3, 7-13, 22). The expression "in Christ," used to convey the concept of union with Christ, was, no doubt, a common expression used to speak of those who had experienced new birth in conversion to Christ and were therefore "new creations in Christ, (2 Cor 5:17).

***Greet Tryphe'na and Trypho'sa, Who Have Labored in the Lord,  
Greet the Beloved Per'sis, Who Labored Much in the Lord***

Note the constant allusion to those Paul calls, “those who labored in the Lord.” It is obvious that the work of Paul and those he considered his colleagues in Christ was considered difficult and demanding, even for the women of the early church, as is evident in Paul's mention of the hard labors of Mary, Tryphe'na, Trypho'sa, and Per'sis. It is interesting that, as he goes through this letter, all the women he greets are characterized as hard workers. It cannot be denied that in the first century, women were very active in the church and gave themselves to the work of the Lord.

***Greet Rufus, Chosen in the Lord, and His Mother and Mine***

*Eklektos* has the literal meaning of “chosen.” Every person is offered the opportunity of experiencing new creation in Christ; those who accept God's gift of new birth are thus called “the chosen.” There are, however, other senses in which the word “chosen” is used. In fact, Phoebe was chosen to carry Paul's letter to Rome. Paul is apparently saying something about Rufus that marks him as someone who has been given a special gift and the use of his gift had distinguished him.

The greeting to “his mother and mine” does not mean Rufus was Paul's natural brother, but that Rufus's mother, somewhere and in some way during Paul's travels and ministry, had cared for the apostle as if he were her own son. Jesus' words of Matt 12 come to mind.

*While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. <sup>47</sup>Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." <sup>48</sup>He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup>Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>50</sup>For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matt 12:46-50).*

Jesus is not here denouncing his family but, rather, is identifying himself with the whole of the human race in terms of kindredness and brotherhood. The same kinds of address are used of brothers and sisters in Christ, but Jesus' natural brothers and sisters are specifically named as those of Nazareth (cf., Matt 13:55).

***Greet Asyncri'tus, Phleg'on, Hermes, Patro'bas  
and the Brethren with Them***

This, as well as other "groupings" of names, may represent those who belonged to a small *ekklesia* in a home, who were part of the larger church in Rome but because of the difficulties of travel were not able to meet at a central location every Lord's day, so they gathered in a home adequate to their needs in order to share their faith with one another through worship and through study of the teachings of Jesus.

***Greet One Another with a Holy Kiss***

The "holy kiss" was an oriental form of greeting, which was adapted by the early church, with men so greeting the men, and women the women. We see this custom in Acts 20:37, with the parting of Paul from Ephesus, "They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him (Paul)." Paul so encourages the church in other places, "All the brothers here send you greetings," he writes, "greet one another with a holy kiss," (1 Cor 16:12, 2 Cor 13:12, and 1 Thess 5:26). Peter encourages the same custom, "Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ," (1 Peter 5:14).

The practice of embracing and kissing friends or kin on the forehead or cheek was common in Old Testament times. Men would sometimes be kissed on the beard. Such kisses were in no way romantic, much less erotic, and kissing on the mouth was rare, except for married couples. The kiss, as the Near-eastern mode of greeting or salutation, was the same as a handshake in Western cultures. The kiss was to be "holy," *hagios*, i.e., free from everything unworthy of their calling as saints (*hagioi*).

***All the Churches of Christ Greet You!***

What do we learn from what we see here in these verses? First of all, that the structure and/or nature of the early church was much different than what we have today. House churches appear to be very common. Why? One of the primary reasons were the limitations of travel. Because the Jews taught that it was a violation of the Law to travel over 7/8 of a mile on the Sabbath, the synagogues were located in the center of the village and the houses were built close to the synagogue structure.

Distance would have been a problem for the early Christians as well. It would take a considerable amount of time to travel from different parts of cities like Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus to a centralized location for the weekly meeting of the church in that city. If Phoebe lived in Cenchre'a, meeting with the church in Corinth would have required a full day of travel. The expediency of the situation would have created the need for a weekly *ekklesia* in someone's home, locally.

Now, does this set a precedent for us and the way we meet together today? Not at all! What they did was the most expedient way of meeting together. We, however, do not have the limitations they did, and can meet in a more expedient way in larger groups, which have their advantages. The more Christians there are meeting together, the greater will be the edifying and empowering effect on those who are a part of such a gathering. Of course, there would have also been advantages to the smaller groups, but that doesn't mean that we have an "either/or" situation.

There is another "first century insight" present here. Why do you think these people came together this way; especially, when it may have been very inconvenient and difficult for them? It is obvious that these people were a part of something that was very important and meaningful to them; and they were willing to give themselves to it completely.

Look at the terminology in this text that tells us who these people were. They are called "fellow workers," they are called "beloved (*agape* people)," they are encouraged to greet one another with expressions of affection and respect, a holy kiss. It doesn't appear that these people met together because that saw it as "**a duty**;" rather, it is clear that they did what they did out of "**desire**," not duty.

Apparently, no one had to quote them Hebrews 10:25 to impress upon them the importance of assembling themselves together. When preachers find themselves preaching on text like Hebrews 10:25, and the sin of being absent from the assembly of the church, and elders begin sending out letter threatening to disfellowship those who have stopped coming to church, something is clearly wrong. Informing them that it is their "duty" to be in the assembly when the church is assembled is not going to change things.

Their absence is not "the" problem; it is a by-product of a deeper problem. They are absent because they have lost the "desire" to be there.

This is the cause of the problem, and treating the symptom is not going to heal their problem, it will only aggravate the problem. They will only have a greater lack of desire to be in the assembly of the saints. Their issue is, most likely, with Jesus and his lordship in their lives, more so than the church *per se*. Then again, the issue may be with the church, and that needs to be addresses; but even here it would actually be an issue in which Jesus stands at the center. If the church is at fault, that would be an issue with Jesus and his lordship as well.

### **Conclusion**

You and I will never have our names listed in Scripture as did these people, but they can be written in a book with far more significance; and Paul is well aware of that book,

*Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life, (Phil 4:3).*

*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels, (Rev 3:5).*

*All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world, (Rev 13:8).*

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books, (Rev 20:12).*

*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, (Rev 21:27).*