

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

Introduction

Forbes reports;

According to the 2006 American Time Use Survey, 58% of people in the U.S. regularly eat on their own. Another survey, from Kelton Research, a national polling firm, in 2008, found that three out of four American adults take their meals alone at least occasionally. Additionally, two-thirds said they'd prefer to eat dinner in their pajamas on the couch rather than have a fancy meal at a restaurant.

Some people eat alone because they want to. Others believe they have too. I am sure there were times in Paul's life where he felt all alone. If this chapter tells us anything about Paul it reminds us that Paul was a people person! That might shock some of you. You might think of Paul as a towering intellect or a passionate ex-Pharisee who changed the course of Christianity and civilization. Imagine you could have lunch or dinner with Paul. You could talk about some fine point of theology or the organization of the church or you might just want to set him straight on his view of women in ministry! Some of us might be a little intimidated. Paul was a great man. How do you have a relationship with a great man? Paul was a people person—who made the effort to form and maintain friendships and relationships. Paul was a pastor and a friend.

A friend is:

a push when you've stopped
a word when you're lonely
a guide when you're searching
a smile when you're sad
a song when you're glad.

The last time I taught the book of Romans our church was going through the process of purchasing and renovating our building. One well meaning congregant suggested we skip the Bible study and simply pray and seek the Lord about the building and its future. Then he said something interesting; "Romans 16 is just a list of names anyway". There is a time to pray and a time to teach Romans 16. But for the person who thinks this is simply a list of names fails to appreciate both the context and the text. You may read a list of names. I read a list of names of people that Paul met and cared about. If the only thing you learn about this list is that Paul cared about people and loved people and exercised warmth and tenderness towards people; we will have learned much.

The word 'greet' appears 19 times and 17 of those times are by the Apostle Paul. Our text has 23 names. 24 were in Rome (17 men and 7 women). In addition there are two households; the mother of Rufus, and the sister of Nereus. 9 of the people mentioned were with Paul in Corinth (8 men and 1 woman). Paul appears to have developed a number of warm personal affectionate relationships (see R. Kent Hughes pp.295-296). Remember Paul's location as he writes; he is in Corinth. Near Corinth is the harbor of Cenchrea—a busy bustling—port with people coming and going. Paul is keeping in touch. Paul will list their name and then some outstanding character

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

trait. What's in a name? A lot. Susan Boatright tells this story in an article in Today's Christian Woman;

At church one morning, my friend Gwen was about to start her 4 year old's Sunday School class when a little boy showed up without any identification. Gwen managed to get his first name, but couldn't find out his last name. "Brian, what's your daddy's name?" she asked. "Daddy," he replied. She tried again. "Brian, what's your mommy's name?" "Mommy." He answered. Suddenly she realized exactly how she could get the answer she needed. "Brian, what does your daddy call your mommy?" His face lit up. With a grin and a deep voice, he replied, "Hey Babe".

Each name becomes a challenge for us to draw close and walk in closer fellowship with the Lord and each other. Listen to the warmth and tenderness in Paul's heart as greets the people he has come to love over the years. Paul was a great man and a great Bible Teacher but he was also a people person. People had access to Paul. And Paul had access to people. It would appear that Paul did not base friendship on gender or theological sophistication or intellectual capacity or Bible literacy. What makes this list so interesting is that Paul is greeting people in Rome; a place where Paul had never been! These are people Paul has met over the course of a lifetime of adventures in Christ. It takes time and energy and effort to stay in touch. Haven't you said—this year I need to send that family newsletter or Christmas Cards—and feel guilty reading all the cards and letters that come to you!

Stand By The Saints (vv.1-2)

Romans 16:1–16 (NKJV) I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,

2that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Phoebe was the bearer of precious cargo. She is the ancient Fed-Ex or UPS lady. She will bear the precious letter written by Paul to the Romans. This letter of Romans will encourage the saints in Rome and change hearts and lives in every generation. This letter changed Martin Luther's life and launched the Protestant Reformation. Luther's commentary on Romans was read late at night by one John Wesley and he got saved! This was the letter preached the snowy Sunday morning when Spurgeon as a young man got saved! Think of the tens of thousands of people who have walked the Romans road; heard it preached and have been saved!

Paul calls Phoebe a 'sister'; a 'servant'; 'saint' and 'a great help'. Her name means 'bright' or 'radiant'. The name 'Phoebe' was also one of the titles given to the Greek goddess Diana—which may mean Phoebe was raised in a pagan household.

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

Can a woman be a deacon in the church? The answer is yes!. Phoebe was a 'servant' (diakonon). I believe she was a leader; an official representative of the church at Corinth. In the early church the separation of the genders were pretty profound. The debate of course is whether Phoebe is functioning in both official and practical capacity. There can be no doubt about the practical capacity. Phoebe was to be welcomed and received because she stood with the saints in their need—and now it was time to stand with Phoebe in her need.

The expression “and assist her in whatever business she has need of you” suggests she had some personal or legal or family business in Rome. Believers are to receive and welcome one another; it is our universal obligation. The church is not a members only—country club establishment. We are not a society of cliques. We are not to reject a Christian believer because they do not belong to our local church or specific denomination or share our skin color or language or cultural heritage. We are not to reject a Christian because they do not live on our neighborhood. We can of course treat them like dirt if they are Raider or Seahawk fans (just kidding).

What are the great lessons from Phoebe? Women leaders serve valuable roles and are to be treated with dignity and afforded great courtesy. Minister and serve the saints. Job told his friends (Job 29:15); “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.” In Proverbs 31:20 we read; “She stretches out her hand on behalf of the poor; yes she reaches her hands to the needy.”

We stand with the Saints here and everywhere.

Salute Those Who Sacrifice (vv.3-5)

*3Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
4who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*

It is one thing to be supportive of the ministry; but it is another thing to risk your life in the support of saints; for the support of the servants of Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Priscilla and Aquila had put their lives on the line for Paul in Ephesus.

They opened their hearts, and then they opened their home and then they risked their lives for Paul. They must have spent some time in Rome—but the Emperor Claudius banished Jews from Rome in AD 52. Paul is writing this letter some time after 56 AD—58 AD; and so the Jews were allowed to reenter Rome. Before their return back to Rome, Priscilla and Aquila made their home in Corinth. They were the couple who first opened their new home in Corinth to Paul when he arrived in Corinth. This was also the couple who invited Paul to join them in the business of making tents. They later traveled with Paul to Ephesus where they settled (Acts 18:18). Wherever we see Priscilla and Aquila, they have opened their hearts, their homes; for worship, friendship and fellowship teaching and instruction. This is the couple who opened their homes to such famous guests as Apollos from Alexandria and instructed him in the finer points of the gospel (see Acts 18:24-26). They had church meetings in their homes in Corinth, Ephesus

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

and Rome! Paul called them “my fellow workers” or “my helpers”. Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul in Ephesus—perhaps when he came under such profound threats and vicious attacks.

Priscilla and Aquila had a consistent testimony of hospitality, instruction and sacrifice. They were the epitome of Romans 12:13; “Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality”.

In Hebrews 13:2 we read; “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”

What if I don't want to open my home? What if I am a loner (introvert); not friendly etc? The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:9; “Use hospitality one to another without grudging”.

Are you a Co-laborer with Christ? Are you a helper in the ministry of Jesus? Many of you have opened your homes to guests and groups coming through the Front Range of Colorado. Praise God.

5Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.

Achaia is the ancient Roman Province of Central and Southern Greece. This is the first person Paul led to Christ in that area. Apparently Epaenetus has moved to Rome. He may have been a member of the household of Stephanas who is called the first fruits of Achaia (1 Cor. 1:16; 1 Cor. 16:15,17).

It takes raw courage to be the first in a pagan family to come to Christ. Abraham's father was an idol maker. I was the first in my family to come to Christ. Who will be first? The first to surrender, repent and return to the Christ of the Bible. Risking ridicule, misunderstanding, mockery, withdrawal, isolation, rejection—Epaenetus had courage—“Whosoever will confess me before men, him will confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-33).

Do you remember the first person you ever led to Christ? Do you keep in touch?

Stay In Touch (vv.6-16)

6Greet Mary, who labored much for us.

We have no idea what she did or where she did it; but she worked with Paul's team! Whatever it was—it was a labor of love that required effort! “Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unlovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

You might think; “no one notices or cares what I do. No one sees my effort. No one cares.” God knows. The Lord watches—and cares.

7Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Two believers, converts—Jews—who become convicts—imprisoned with Paul. Can you imagine doing time with Paul in a first century jail cell? Where Andronicus and Junia husband and wife? We are not told. They are called ‘kinsmen’ or ‘countrymen’ which may mean Jews or it may mean relatives! When and where they went to jail—we don’t know but we know their commitment to Christ and love for Jesus caused the Apostles to stand up and take notice. They were willing to suffer hardship and for their faith—even if that meant incarceration. They were a part of Paul’s mission team—if only for a while. They were known and highly esteemed by the other Apostles—the grammar and language even allows for the possibility that Andronicus and Junia might be considered in the company of the Apostles (or Apostles themselves!). If that is the case then Junia might be considered ‘an apostle’. Their commitment to Christ preceded Paul’s—which means they were among the first Jews to come to Christ—having been converted before the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). Were these relatives of Paul who also played some role in influencing Saul—the Pharisee in his pre-conversion years? Did they pray for him? Before Jesus showed up on that eventful trip to Damascus? Did their decision to trust Jesus generate more anger and hostility and rebellion in Saul’s hearts towards these so called Jesus followers? Whatever it means—it must mean we continue our witness to family and friends!

8Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.

This is the patron saint of electricians (just kidding). Paul cares about this person. The Lord by his Holy Spirit causes Paul to remember one Amplias. Generations will read and speak his name and remember he is beloved in the Lord.

9Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.

Urbanus—a man who worked side by side with Paul; characterized by unusual diligence; faith and loyalty. He met Paul on one of his journeys; perhaps a tradesman or salesman or a soldier. Stachys—called beloved—his dominant feature—loved and cared for.

10Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

Apelles—tried and approved in Christ as faithful. It may be that Apelles had undergone some horrible trial or extreme suffering and stood against it and was approved loyal beyond question.

Something else—it may be that his character in that trial left a lasting impression upon Paul. Does your attitude and conduct in great trial or suffering leave a lasting impression upon those

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

around you? So far as we know Apelles was a regular guy—no books or seminars or conferences or world-wide ministry—yet is tested and is found approved (loyal).

11 Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.

Are Tryphena and Tryphosa the ancient version of the Olson twins? Their names mean “dainty” and “delicate”. In elementary school growing up there were many sets of twins; like Tarel and Taren. My aunt and uncle—Linda Gale and Roger Dale. Paul says Dainty and Delicate worked hard in the Lord! The expression “have labored” is a word that means to the point of utter exhaustion!

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

Who is this guy? In Mark's gospel (15:21) we read; “Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.”

Is this the same Rufus? Perhaps. If it is—his famous father carried the cross of Jesus when Jesus stumbled and fell.

The cultural scholar William Barclay writes; “Now if the man is identified by the names of his sons, it means that although he himself may not be personally known to the community to whom the story is being told, the sons are. To what Church did Mark write the gospel? Almost certainly he wrote it for the Church of Rome, and he knew that the Church would know who Alexander and Rufus were. . . He was the son of Simon who carried the cross of Jesus” (quoted in R. Kent Hughes pp. 297-298).

14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.

15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

Conclusion

I read a sad story some time ago. An 87 year old widow in Grand Rapids appealed to the state to place her in a nursing home. “I don't blame people for not taking time to see me. I'm not very interesting.” she said. “Everybody I knew is either dead or moved away. I'd like some company.” The newspaper article reporting on her situation went on to state that except for a shopping trip once or twice a month this widow rarely left her apartment. Her typical day began

Welcome! What's Your Name?

Romans 16:1-16

at 6:30 AM with a breakfast of toast and coffee. Then she would water her “garden in the kitchen,” which consisted of five small potted plants. After tidying up the place, she would spend the rest of the day looking out her window. Her day ended at 8:30. After a light supper she went to bed” (R. Kent Hughes p. 298).

People eat alone. Sometimes because they want to—and others because they have too. In his book “The Greening of America” Charles Reich writes; “America is one vast terrifying anti community. The great organizations to which most people give their working day, and the apartments and suburbs to which they return at night, are equally places of loneliness and alienation. . .Protocol, competition, hostility and fear have replaced the warmth of the circle of affection which might sustain man against a hostile universe.”

Sometimes the world is very cold. Tragically—sometimes the church is even colder than the world. Paul’s solution—“Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Does this mean that we actually kiss one another? In some cultures that is exactly what they do! Italian people kiss and squeeze with great enthusiasm. Jewish people were very demonstrative—as is common in the Middle East and among Russians and Arabs! You may have been raised in a culture where you express affection by a handshake or a smile or an invitation!

We are to be people people. Do you know the number one reason why people go to and remain at any given church? Its not the worship service—its not even the Pastor. It’s not the children’s ministry or the programs at the church. The number one reason why people stay at a church is the nature of the people who are all ready there! Theology matters—to me. Worship and the Word and the Student and Children ministries all matter to me. But to the unchurched—to the lonely, to the empty—friendly caring people matter more!

One person wrote; “I probably wouldn’t know good religious teaching from bad, or a great sermon from one that breaks every rule in the preaching manual. But I sure know nice people from jerks, and real people from hypocrites. I’d stay at a church with lousy teaching but genuinely friendly people, people who got to know me and cared about me and respected my needs and boundaries, before I’d stay at a place with perfect teaching and lousy people” (See Barna: Rechurching the Unchurched pp. 79-80).