



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 49



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

A TRIBUTE TO UNCOMMON SAINTS

^{16:1} I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that 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. ³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who labored much for us. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 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. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 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.

(Romans 16:1-16) ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Those who become related to Jesus obtain a certain distinction and profitability that is worthy of recognition. They are no longer “common,” and are, in a very real sense, separated from the masses of unregenerate peoples. For this reason, they are referred to “a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people**” (1 Pet 2:9). Although such people may have been

relatively unknown prior to their connection with Jesus, now their names are “*written in heaven*” (Heb 12:23). They are duly recognized by God, intercession is made for them by Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells them, and they are ministered to by the holy angels. It is difficult to conceive of obtaining a more impressive status. Some illustrations of this observation will serve to prepare us for a

considering the sixteenth chapter of Romans and our approach to believers.

IN PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING

- ▣ Abraham (Gal 3:16).
- ▣ The Holy Prophets (1 Pet 1:11).
- ▣ Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-13).
- ▣ John the Baptist (Matt 3:10-3).
- ▣ Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk 1:26-39).

People obtain Distinction and Profitability in Christ Jesus, and it is worthy of due Recognition--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- < PHOEBE OUR SISTER (16:1-2)
- < PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, FELLOW WORKERS (16:3-5)
- < EPAENETUS, THE FIRST FRUITS (16:5b)
- < MARY, WHO LABORED MUCH (16:6)
- < ANDRONICUS AND JUNIA, OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES (16:7)
- < AMPLIAS, MY BELOVED (16:8)
- < URBANUS AND STACHYS (16:9)
- < APELLES, ARISTOBULUS, HERODION, AND NARCISSUS (16:10-11)
- < TRYPHENA, TYPHOSA, PERSIS, AND REFUS (16:12-13)
- < ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON, HERMAS, PATROBAS, HERMES, PHILOGUS, JULIA, NEREUS AND OLYMPAS (16:14-15)
- < ONE ANOTHER AND THE CHURCHES (16:16)

ASSOCIATED WITH JESUS' BIRTH

- ▶ The shepherds (Lk 2:6-20).
- ▶ The wise men from the East (Matt 2:1-20).
- ▶ Simeon (Lk 2:25-34).
- ▶ Anna (Lk 2:36-38).
- ▶ Those looking for redemption in Jerusalem (Lk 2:38).

DURING CHRIST'S MINISTRY

- ▶ The Apostles (Matt 10:1-2).
- ▶ Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52).
- ▶ Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:25-30).
- ▶ Gentile centurion (Matt 8:5-10).
- ▶ Mary and Martha (John 11:1-11).
- ▶ Lazarus (John 11:1-43)
- ▶ Mary Magdalene (Lk 8:2).
- ▶ Mary the mother of Zebedee's children, James and John (Matt 20:20).
- ▶ Nicodemus (John 3:1-9; 7:50-53).
- ▶ Former Gadarene demoniac (Mk 5:1-19).
- ▶ Woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11).
- ▶ Woman with the alabaster box (Matt 26:7-13).

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

- ▶ Joseph of Arimathea (Mk 15:43-46).
- ▶ Nicodemus (John 19:39).
- ▶ Mary the mother of James and Josés,

or Joseph (Mk 13:55).

- ▶ Mary the mother of Zebedee's children, James and John (Matt 27:56).
- ▶ Salome (Mk 15:40; 16:1).
- ▶ Mary Magdalene (Mat 27:56; 28:1).

The above listing is by no means complete, and is intended only to illustrate the point. Where would we ever have heard of these men and women if they were not favorably related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Our total recollection of them is because of Him! **And, if those related to Him when He was upon the earth obtained significance, how much more will this be true of those joined to Him now that He is enthroned in glory.**

THE TEXT BEFORE US

The text before us will mention twenty-eight saints. Most of them are only mentioned in this passage. In the last part of the sixteenth chapter, Paul will also make mention of eight more believers: Timotheous, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertium, Gaius, Erasmus, and Quartus. All of this serves to emphasize the respect Paul afforded those who distinguished themselves by laboring for Christ Jesus. His manner teaches us how to speak of one another.

Those Mentioned

An extremely pertinent point can be made about WHO Paul mentions. Both men and women are included. **Eighteen men are mentioned:** Aquila, Epäenetus, Andronicus, Implies, Urbane, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodian, Narcissus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Philologue, Nereus, and Olympus. **Ten key women are also mentioned:** Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, "his mother" (Rufus), "his sister" (Nereus), and Julia. The distinctions given to these saints will further reveal the nature of the heavenly Kingdom. It will conflict sharply with certain views of sisters in Christ that have been promoted in His holy name.

Additionally, we will see the practice of certain believers to have a church in their house (16:5). Some people will be noted for "much labor" (16:6). There will even be reference to certain "kinsmen," or relatives (16:7). Some will be distinguished for being held in high regard by the

Apostles (16:7). Others will be acknowledged as special helpers, who have assisted many (16:2). Particular mentioning is made of some who risked their lives for Paul himself (16:4). A person who was the first convert in his area will be acknowledged (16:5). Some will be noted for being especially beloved (16:8,9,12). One will be distinguished as "approved in Christ" (16:10a), and an entire household will be saluted (16:10b). Husbands and wives are mentioned (16:3,7,15), as well as two sisters who labored in the Lord (16:12). Of one, Paul says he was "chosen in the Lord" (16:13). He even mentions a woman who ministered as a mother to himself (16:13).

A Precise Manner

You see the precise manner in which the Apostle speaks of the saints of God. There is a total absence of favoritism, sectarianism, or the respect of persons. No one is known "after the flesh," but everyone is seen after the Spirit. The average church could improve in the manner in which they speak of one another, and of other saints. Too often, there is a spirit of fleshly camaraderie in the churches, with people gravitating to those with similar fleshly interests. Many believers have been wounded by this tendency, which is altogether out of order. The saints of God are to be recognized after the heavenly manner. **Whatever distinguishes them to the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and holy angels, should distinguish them to us.**

There simply is no place in the body of Christ for a party spirit, or for attitudes that allow members to look at the people of God through the lense of flesh. Indeed, it is no small accomplishment when believers can consider one another in the spirit of this text. Notwithstanding the difficulty of achieving this attitude, it is the only one that will be honored by God. Jesus died "for all," in order that "those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view"^{NIV} (2 Cor 5:16).

Living unto the Lord, therefore, involves having a proper view of His people, zealously avoiding carnal views of them, and seeking to advantage them.

PHOEBE, OUR SISTER

“^{16:1} I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,² that 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.”

Paul spoke of certain individuals to believers, either recommending them and their ministry, or warning the saints of them. Thus he warned Timothy of “Alexander the coppersmith,” “Hymenaeus,” “Philetus,” and “Phygellus and Hermogenes” (2 Tim 1:20; 2:17; 4:14). He also warned the church about teachers who served their own interests, caused divisions, and “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18). He also was careful to recommend certain saints who had distinguished themselves among believers by their faithfulness, genuine concern, and spiritual abilities. Among them were Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19-20), Titus (2 Cor 8:16,23), Tychicus (Col 4:7-8), Onesimus (Col 4:9), and others.

In this manner, we see the depth and sincerity of Paul’s concern for the welfare of the saints. He carefully sought good things for those whom the church received, and for the church of God itself. This was a consistent pattern in his life, and further confirms the genuineness of his calling. **It is highly unlikely that anyone lacking this concern is called of God to minister among His people.** Throughout Scripture, those who were called by God generally became absorbed with His will. Judas, who “by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25), is an exception. Jonah is also an exception, who initially ran away from the work to which he was called (Jonah 1:3). However, those cases, as well as any similar ones, are not the Kingdom standard, or norm.

I COMMEND TO YOU

“I commend unto you Phebe . . .”

Here is an Apostolic recommendation. Every major version reads the same way. One exception is the Basic Bible English (BBE) version which reads, “It is my desire to say a good word for Phoebe.”

In commending Phebe (or Phoebe), Paul is approving of her and her work. More precisely, he is articulating his approval, standing together with her in the good work she was doing. He does not leave it to the saints to examine Phebe and finally perceive her worthiness. Rather, he sets her before them to remove all doubt from their mind. She has proved herself before him, and there is therefore no need for her to again do it before the brethren in Rome. How quick saints ought to be in speaking well of those who have clearly shown their identity with, and allegiance to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know nothing more of Phebe than what is made known in this text. This is why Paul recommends her to the brethren. There was no need for those who were well known to have letters or words of recommendation. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 3:1). Phebe was one those “others” who required such a word.

She stands a notable example of someone whom was “unknown, and yet well known” (2 Cor 6:9). The name “Phebe,” (or “Phoebe”) means “bright or radiant.” After what is said of her, it becomes apparent she was appropriately named. **It is generally understood that Phebe is the one to whom Paul gave this Epistle, to be delivered to the brethren in Rome.** She is the only one Paul especially recommends, mentioning that she might very well require some insistence in matters of business. This lends itself to the conclusion she actually delivered the letter to the church in Rome. Some conclude her business carried her there, and Paul took advantage of the trip to send along this Epistle. There is nothing abrasive or contradictory about this view, although it is not essential that all

embrace it.

OUR SISTER

“ . . . our sister . . . ” Paul recognizes Phebe in the Lord, for he knew no person “after the flesh.” She was a sister in Christ, and was so recognized. There are people who either object to using this term, or simply are not inclined to do so. In giving directions to the married who had divided homes, the Spirit referred to believers as “a brother or sister” (1 Cor 7:15). James also referred to destitute believers as “a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food” (James 2:15). Young Timothy was reminded to consider younger believing women as “sisters,” and older believing women as “mothers” (1 Tim 5:2). Thus we see that spiritual relationships supercede fleshly ones.

A SERVANT OF THE CHURCH IN CENCHREA

“ . . . which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.” Other versions read, “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae,”^{NRSV/NRS} “a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae,”^{RSV/NJB} “who is in the ministry of the church, that is in Cenchrae,”^{DRA} “who is minister of the assembly which is in Cenchrea,”^{DBY}

Two Kinds of Servants

The word “servant” comes from the Greek word δούκων (diakonon), which refers to one who carries out the commands of another. This is one who is a helper, ministering to the needs of others. This is the word Jesus used when He said, “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your **minister**” (Matt 20:26). Other versions say “servant.” Jesus Himself is referred to as a “minister (or servant) of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8). The Spirit also refers to Paul and Apollos as “ministers,” or “servants” (1 Cor 3:5). Paul acknowledged he was “made a minister,” or “servant” (Eph

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3:7). Other individuals designated as “ministers,” or “servants” include Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Epaphras (Col 1:7), and Timothy (1 Thess 3:2).

There is another word that is translated “servant.” It is δούλος (doolos), and denotes a slave who does the will of another. It is used of social slaves (1 Cor 7:21; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5-6), as well as those who are bond-servants to Jesus through redemption (Rom 6:16-17,19-20; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 1:1). Jesus is also said to have humbled Himself to become such a Servant (Phil 2:7).

The Difference in the Words

The difference in the two words is this. A bond-servant, slave, or servant (δούλος) speaks of the MANNER in which

are to remain in the background, with no official capacity, the presence of Phebe will prove quite challenging. There are religious systems in which a woman like Phebe simply could not arise. Such systems are unworthy of any dignity, and are to be rejected. It was within the real body of Christ that Phebe surfaced, was commended, and had a ministry.

The Church at Cenchrea

This was the city where Paul took a temple vow with certain Jews, shaving his head (Acts 18:18). It was located in Greece, and was the port of Corinth, on the east side of the isthmus (a narrow strip of land connecting two areas), and about nine miles from the city itself. Some suppose Phebe was a rich and generous woman who was disposed to give to the

“give her, in the Lord, a welcome worthy of God’s holy people.”^{NJB}

There are two possible meanings of this text. The first is that the brethren in Rome should receive Phebe as is befitting for THEM to do. The second is that they should receive Phebe in a manner that matched her good work for the Lord, or as SHE should be received. There is a sense in which both of these are right. The idea is that it would not be fitting, or appropriate, for the brethren to fail to show Phebe dignity and kindness.

Our reception of one another, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their Kingdom labors, is to be “in the Lord.” That means a reception that is because of Christ, and out of a recognition of the individual’s participation in the work of God.

The brethren in Rome were not to receive Phebe as a woman, a member of the business community, or some other form of fleshly differentiation. She was to be received “in the Lord,” as a member of His body, one who was participating in the Divine nature, and one who was a worker together with God.

However, this was more than a mere formality. Phebe was a servant of the church at Cenchrea. She was engaged in a noble work, and she was to be so received. This sister had obtained a certain distinction in Christ, and it was fitting that she be so recognized by the saints.

ASSIST HER

“ . . . and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you . . . ” Other versions read, “help her in whatever matter she may have need of you,”^{NASB} “give her any help she may need from you,”^{NIV} “help her in whatever she may require from you,”^{NRSV} and “assist her in whatever business she hath need of you.”^{WEB}

First, there are many congregations and systems of theology that could not receive a sister in this manner. Their view of the Kingdom does not even allow for the existence of such a woman. They do not see ladies as having any role whatsoever that requires assistance of the rest of the body – particularly in “business”

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we live for the Lord, doing His bidding and fulfilling His will. This word is never translated “minister.” In the second use of the word (as in our text, “minister,” or “servant” denoted an **official capacity**, or one assigned to fulfill a particular work – like the seven who were appointed over the daily distribution to widows in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). This is the same word used by Peter when speaking of certain spiritual gifts. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man **minister**, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11).

Phebe was a “servant,” or “minister,” by special assignment. That is precisely why the brethren will be told to assist her in any way required. For those who feel all women in the body of Christ

needy, and thus represented the church in that capacity. At any rate, she was especially commended because of her effective ministry.

Other prominent and capable women are also mentioned in Scripture (2 Kgs 4:8; Psa 45:9; Luke 8:3; Acts 9:36-37; 13:50; 16:14-16; 17:12). It is good when those with such capabilities make themselves available for the service of the King of kings.

RECEIVE HER IN THE LORD

“That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints . . . ” Other versions read, “that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,”^{NKJV/NASB/NIV} “so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints,”^{NRSV} “That you will take her in kindly, after the way of the saints,”^{BBE} “Receive her in the Lord, as one who is worthy of high honor,”^{NLT}

matters relating to the work of the Lord. But Phebe's record has been placed in Scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it will no doubt be a factor when the saints stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“Assist.” This word means to be at the disposal of someone, to come to the aid of, and be ready and prepared to help them. It includes the idea of yielding to an individual, aggressively standing by them in their labors.

“Business.” Here is a word that speaks something specific that is being accomplished – something like a mission, or “whatever matter.” It refers to a specific undertaking or task. We assume this undertaking was being done in the name or behalf of the church in Cenchrea, for she was a servant of that congregation. The particulars of the “business,” however, are not stated. Therefore, I conclude that it was not the nature of the business Phebe was conducting that was to move the Roman brethren to assist her. Rather, it was the nature of the woman herself, and her role in Christ's body.

SHE HAS BEEN A HELPER

“... for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also.” Other versions read, “she has been a helper,” ^{NKJV} “she has been a great help,” ^{NIV} “she has been a benefactor,” ^{NRSV} and “she has also

assisted.” ^{DRA}

Among other things, Paul recommends Phebe because of her consistency. The mission she was currently fulfilling was not her initial involvement with the work of the Lord. Like Gaius (3 John 1:5-6), she had helped sojourning brethren on their way, being hospitable like Lydia was to Paul and company (Acts 16:15), and Mary and Martha were to Jesus (Lk 10:38-39).

As a passing note, it is interesting to observe that a married woman is here (1 Tim 5) depicted as lodging saints, washing their feet, relieving the afflicted, and diligently following every good work. Those who imagine the wife can do nothing without the express permission of her husband should ponder this circumstance. The woman who prepared a lodging place for the prophet Elisha initiated the suggestion to her husband that a place be prepared for the prophet because he was a holy man. Obviously, her husband acquiesced, for the place was prepared (2 Kings 4:8-11). While this does not suggest carnal independence on the part of the wife, it does show that a virtuous woman is on the initiative to do good works. Phebe was this kind of woman.

Whether she was a widow or not, we do not know. She did, however, do the works that would qualify a widow to be supported by the church: “if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim 5:10). It is comely that such be found among us.

“Succorer.” This is a most interesting word. It comes from the Greek word *προστάτις* (*prostatis*), which means “a woman set over others, a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources.” ^{STRONGS} Young's Literal; Translation follows this meaning by reading, “for she also became a leader of many, and of myself.” This does not suggest Phebe lead out in Paul's Apostleship. Rather, it was in her ministry TO him that she led as a provider and servant, supplying his needs. As is true of all stewardship and gifts, the individual possessing them is a custodian of a particular ministry, being responsible for its fulfillment. This is submitting to one another, which is enjoined upon the church (1 Pet 5:5). In this way, we become the recipient of grace that has been given to another.

Like Dorcas, Phebe was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). The brethren are now admonished to come to her assistance, that she might reap bountifully, for she had sown bountifully (Cor 9:6). We should take care to avoid any view of our sisters that would not allow us to receive a woman like Phebe into our fellowship. There are theological views held by some believers that would not permit such a woman to rise from among them, or allow them to receive such a notable, much less come to her assistance.

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, FELLOW WORKERS

“³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

Care must be taken not to regard this passage as inconsequential – words that simply take up space. The Spirit never speaks aimlessly or without profit. Expressions like these reveal the manner of the Kingdom – the way faith and a love for the brethren move a person to speak.

Nearly every perceptive soul will

acknowledge words like these do not blend with common church manners. Rarely do we hear people speaking of one another in this way. All of this confirms the serious decline that exists in the modern church. There are reasons why professed Christians do not think and speak as this text. It is enough to mention this, and urge sober reflection upon that circumstance.

Nearly every perceptive soul will acknowledge words like these do not blend with common church manners. Rarely do we hear people speaking of one another in this way.

Now, Paul makes mention of Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband of note in Scripture. What is said of them distinguishes them among the saints.

First Mentioning

The first mentioning of this couple is in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. We learn there that Aquila was a Jew “born

in Pontus,” which was in the Northeastern part of Asia Minor. On the day of Pentecost, “Pontus” was one of the places represented when the people heard the wonderful works of God in their native tongue (Acts 2:9). It was also included among the dispersed believers to whom Peter wrote (1 Pet 1:1).

When Paul first met this couple in Corinth, they had “recently come from Italy,” “because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome” (Acts 18:2). Claudius was a Caesar. It was during his reign that a severe famine took place that was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28). Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, working with them, “because he was a tentmaker as they were”^{NIV} (Acts 18:3).

man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.” He was “instructed in the way of the Lord,” and “was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John.”^{NASB} It was at this point that Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos. Seeing that he only knew about the baptism of John, “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”^{NKJV} As a result, he was inclined to go through Acahai. The brethren wrote, recommending him, and exhorting the disciples to receive him. When Apollos arrived among them, he “helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by

“diminutive or small.”

In the seven references to this couple, “Aquila” is mentioned first only two times (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor 16:19). “Priscilla” is mentioned first five times (Acts 18:18,19,26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). I only mention this to confirm that a rigid and legalistic approach of husbands and wives cannot be supported by either the words or spirit of Scripture.

MY FELLOW WORKERS

“My fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”

Other versions read, “my helpers,”^{KJV} “who work with me,”^{NRSV} and “co-workers in my ministry.”^{NLT} Aquila and Priscilla were companions in labor, working along side of Paul and assisting him in his work. **Whatever work a person has been given from God, there is always room for helpers, or co-laborers.** Both Aquila and Priscilla are included in this most gracious description. Rather than one being in the background, and one in the foreground, as it common in our day, they both were distinguished as Paul’s helpers.

Not only, therefore, were Aquila and Priscilla helpful to Paul, they proved to be a turning point in the remarkable ministry of Apollos, whom Paul referred to as one who “watered” his work

Second Mentioning

Because Jesus revealed to Paul that He had “much people” in the city of Corinth, he remained there for “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” Finally, the Jews in that area made an insurrection against Paul, bringing him into court. The outcome of the whole affair was that Paul “remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, **and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.**” Before he sailed, he “had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow” (Acts 18:18). Thus Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him from a place of trouble to Ephesus, where he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Third Mentioning

From Ephesus, Paul “departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” Aquila and Priscilla did not go with him, but remained in Ephesus.

While there, “a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent

the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:26-28).

Not only, therefore, were Aquila and Priscilla helpful to Paul, they proved to be a turning point in the remarkable ministry of Apollos, whom Paul referred to as one who “watered” his work (1 Cor 3:6).

The Fourth Mention

Excluding our text, the next mention of this godly couple is found in First Corinthians. There Paul sent greetings from them and the church in their house to the saints in Corinth (1 Cor 16:19).

The Fifth Mention

In addition to our text, the final mention of Aquila and Priscilla is in the book of Second Timothy. There Priscilla is referred to as “Prisca,” which is a variant of the name Priscilla (much like “Pete” is of “Peter”). Timothy is told to salute, or greet, this holy couple (2 Tim 4:19). How thankful I am for their mentioning.

Their Names

As a point of interest, “Aquila” means “an eagle,” and “Priscilla” means

“Fellow workers” are people engaged in productive Kingdom labors. It means more than simply belonging to the same church, or embracing the same creed. I fear that within the institutional mind-set, there is little, if any, room for expressions like this. Too many professed believers are rarely associated with doing anything for the Lord, or participating in any Kingdom enterprise.

THEY RISKED THEIR LIVES

“. . . who risked their own necks for my life.” Other versions read, “Who have for my life laid down their own necks,”^{KJV} “They risked their lives for me,”^{NIV} and “Who for my life put their necks in danger”^{BBE}

Aquila and Priscilla had exposed themselves to great danger for the sake of Paul, or to save his life. We are not given the particulars in this matter, in order that our minds not be distracted by carnal curiosity. Nor, indeed, are we apprised when this thoughtful deed took place. Aquila and Priscilla were with Paul in both Corinth and Ephesus. In both of those places, a great uproar broke out. In Corinth and insurrection broke out

against Paul, and Sosthenes, ruler of the synagogue, was dragged into court and beaten (Acts 18:12-17). In Ephesus, Demetrius and the silversmiths caused a great and dangerous tumult (Acts 19:24-30). Perhaps Aquila and Priscilla risked their lives during one of those times. However, whenever they did, their action confirmed their commitment to Paul and the Gospel he preached. It must have been refreshing for Paul to recall such a rare display of godly commitment.

THE CHURCHES THANK THEM

“. . . unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Paul personally gave thanks to God for their unselfish devotion to the work of the Lord. Like God Himself, He was “not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love,” which they “showed toward *“is name,”* in that they “ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

We do well to also recall those who have inconvenienced themselves for the work of the Lord, and particularly when we have been the objects of their attention. Those who have thought enough of the Lord, His work, and His people, to risk their reputations and lives for the same, are worthy of our remembrance and thanksgiving.

Note, “*all the churches of the Gentiles*” also extended their thanks to Aquila and Priscilla. The “*churches of the Gentiles*” owed this couple thanks because their selfless spirit had enabled the Gospel to come to them. Those who assisted Paul also assisted the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. The fruit of his labors was also credited to the account, for example, of Aquila and Priscilla. They had received a prophet in the name of a prophet, and were thus afforded a prophet’s reward (Matt 10:41). This opens the door to remarkable opportunities for all saints.

THE CHURCH IN THEIR HOUSE

“*Likewise greet the church that is in their house.*” Other versions read, “*Greet*

also the church that meets at their house,”^{NIV} and “*the assembly at their house.*”^{DBY}

Not only did Aquila and Priscilla have a fellowship meeting in their house in or near Rome, they had done the same

in other places as well (1 Cor 16:19). It seems that wherever they lived, they gathered kindred spirits about them for spiritual profitability.

In this special greeting, we catch a glimpse of the spirit of Paul, as well as the manner of the Kingdom. He writes to “*all*” who were beloved of God “*in Rome*” (1:7). We do not know if this was a particularly large assembly, several individual ones, or some other form of brethren joined together. The point is that Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, recognized this family who had a gathering of believers in their home. Whatever one chooses to believe about such fellowships, keep in mind that the

Those who assisted Paul also assisted the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. The fruit of his labors was also credited to the account, for example, of Aquila and Priscilla.

Apostle Paul sent a special greeting to this one, acknowledging their prominence before the Lord.

Candidly, institutionalism has robbed many people of just such a perspective. It is a good one to, as some say, “restore.”

EPAENETUS, THE FIRST FRUITS

“Greet my beloved Epäenetüs, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” This is the only mention of this brother in Scripture. Very little is said of him, but what is said is very significant. He was “*the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.*” Achaia was a Roman province in Western Asia Minor. This was the area in which the Holy Spirit once forbade Paul to preach the Gospel (Acts 16:6). It is obvious, however, that this was not intended to be a permanent prohibition, for here we read of fruit “*to Christ*” there. Believers must learn that Divine guidance is not by broad mandate, but by the ordering of our steps. **The very areas that are blocked on one occasion, can be opened on another.**

Most of the later versions read “*Asia,*” instead of Achaia. Some prefer this reading because otherwise they imagine there is a conflict with First Corinthians, which declares that “*the house of Stephanas*” was the “*firstfruits of Achaia*” (1 Cor 16:15). However, there is no need for conflict. *Epäenetüs* could very well have been a member of the household of Stephanas, and been the very first one of that house to turn to the Lord. A distinct privilege, indeed!

As an additional consideration, the people of God should have an approach to the Word of God that discourages skepticism and doubt, giving precedence to faith. This may not meet with the

approval of supposed scholars, but God has rejected their wisdom (1 Cor 1:20).

FIRST FRUITS, OR FIRST CONVERT?

Other versions read, “*the first convert.*”^{NASB/NIV} I prefer the word “*first fruits,*” which is the literal rendering of the word ἀπαρχή. That word in no way can be translated “*convert.*” The word “*convert*” is an interpretation, not a translation.

The word “*first fruits*” has its roots in the First Covenant and its ordinances, not in etymology. In Israel, God instituted the “*Feast of Harvest,*” in which the first fruits sown in the field were offered to the Lord (Ex 23:16). All of the first fruits of

the land belonged to the Lord (Ex 23:19), and were given to Him in order to sanctify what remained. Through this term, God taught the people of beginnings – of something good followed by more of the same.

This precise word is used seven times in the Apostolic writings, and always in the above manner. It represents a spiritual manner of expression.

- ☐ Romans 11:16 uses the word as an example of a whole “*lump*” being dedicated by its “*firstfruit*,” applying the principle to Israel being sanctified by Abraham.
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 29 use the word to describe Jesus Christ as the

first to rise from the dead, thereby guaranteeing the resurrection of those who sleep in Jesus.

- ☐ In 1 Corinthians 16:19, “*first fruits*” is used in the same sense as our text, denoting the first of a larger harvest of souls from a particular area.
- ☐ In James 1:18, the word employed to describe those in Christ, who are the first to be redeemed from the impersonal creation, which will also be redeemed at the resurrection (Rom 8:21).
- ☐ Revelation 14:4 uses the word to describe the pledge of a great harvest of souls described as “*redeemed from among men*.” In these instances, it portrays the working of the Lord.

In all of these cases, “*firstfruits*”

denotes the first of more to come – the beginning of a great Divine work. It denotes a pledge or more, and a sanctification of the rest. There is something about the word that is fresh and unique. As “*the first fruits of Achaia*,” *Epaenetus* was the proof that many more people of God would surface in that area. As the “*firstfruits*,” he stood out as the pledge of a greater harvest that would be reaped when the fields were white. No doubt, for his sake, that area was spared.

Achaia was an area dominated by idolatry and spiritual ignorance. Yet, the Gospel had penetrated this citadel of darkness. It was therefore especially precious that *Epaenetus* was the first – a sort of guarantee to Paul of more to come.

MARY, WHO LABORED MUCH

“⁶ **Greet Mary, who labored much for us.**” Other versions read, “*who bestowed much labor on us*,”^{KJV} “*who has worked hard for you*,”^{NASB} and “*who has worked very hard among you*.”^{NRSV} The differing translations seem to suggest three different meanings. First, that Mary had bestowed much labor upon Paul personally, ministering to him of her substance. Second, that she had expended

laborer and helper among the Roman brethren themselves. Adhering to the practice of humbly receiving the Word of God as the truth, and not approaching it with skepticism, there is no violation of the text in seeing all three things as true. In such a case, because she was faithful in her labors for Christ among them, she also did the same for Paul while he was in some other area. When she did minister to

personally devoted to the Lord.

It is noteworthy that Paul speaks of this sister in such a commendable manner. Not only did she “*labor*,” she “*labored much*,” far exceeding the norm. Perhaps, like those of Macedonia and Achaia, she even labored beyond her natural capacity, extending herself according to the abundance of grace she had received (2 Cor 9:8).

Those who live for Christ should consider the possibility of laboring “*much*,” and giving of themselves to the work of the Lord in an unusual manner.

Those who live for Christ should consider the possibility of laboring “*much*,” and giving of themselves to the work of the Lord in an unusual manner. While men often boast of the average and normal, the man of God boasts of those who extend themselves beyond the boundaries of average and normal. As believers, we are admonished to “*seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church*” (1 Cor 14:12). Here, in Mary, we have an example of one who did.

this labor in the behalf of the brethren in Rome. Third, that she was a prodigious

Paul, she did so as a representative of the brethren in Rome, as well as one who was

ANDONICUS AND JUNIA, OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES

“⁷ **Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.**” I am grateful for these

salutations, for they reveal aspects of the Kingdom of God that should be known. In order to avoid the rise of curiosity and the undue reverence of men, the Spirit does not fill every text of Scripture with the

names of brothers and sisters who rose to greater heights than others. Such a practice would have dulled the edge of truth, for **wherever those who are redeemed are the emphasis, the**

People obtain Distinction and Profitability in Christ Jesus, and it is worthy of due Recognition--by Given O. Blakely

Redeemer Himself becomes less known. However, lest men come to the erroneous conclusion that great blessings are withheld from the masses, an occasional word is said that will dispel such imaginations.

The Divine warehouse of God's grace is filled with much for all saints. God is able to *"do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"* (Eph 3:20). No child of God is excluded from that provision. By siting a few saints here and there, the Spirit is lighting the candle of hope, enabling the saints to seek to be involved in *"exploits,"* as Daniel prophesied. As it is written, *"but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits"* (Dan 11:32) – and that is said to take place during a time when corruption was spreading.

Now we are introduced to a spiritual duo who had obtained extraordinary Kingdom distinction. While the name *"Junia"* can be either masculine or feminine, it is generally agreed this was a woman, probably the wife of Andronicus. This is the only place in Scripture where these distinguished saints are mentioned, but what a testimony is given of them!

MY COUNTRYMEN

" . . . my countrymen." By *"countrymen,"* Paul means they were Jews, of the same fleshly stock as himself. While he placed no confidence in the flesh, and did not regard the saints after the flesh, yet he was careful to give honor to those whose lineage went back to Abraham. Another version refers to them as *"kinsmen."* ^{KJV/NASB} Still another version refers to them as *"relatives."* ^{NIV/NRSV}

The word used here is also translated *"cousins"* (Lk 1:36,58) *"kin"* (Mk 6:4), *"kinsfolk"* (Lk 2:44), and *"kinsman"* (Lk 14:12). In its widest sense, it refers to the Jewish nation as a whole. In its most narrow sense, it refers to those of the same household, distinguishing them from *"brothers"* or *"sisters,"* which is an even closer family association (Lk 14:12). They fell into the category of people for whom Paul had a special affection: *"my kinsmen according to the flesh"* (Rom 9:3). This couple had further distinguished themselves by embracing

the Savior who sprang from the Jewish nation.

FELLOW PRISONERS

" . . . and my fellow prisoners." This was an even loftier distinction – being imprisoned for the name of Jesus. Andronicus and Junia had been imprisoned with Paul. This same term was applied to Arisarchus (Col 4:10) and Epaphras (Philemon 1:23). Whether they were in the same prison at the same time is not confirmed, but that appears to be the case. There were also other saints that were imprisoned together, i.e., the Apostles (Acts 5:18) and Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25-26).

If their imprisonment was in one place, they no doubt sharpened one another's countenance, and strengthened each other's faith during their time

apostles." ^{NLT} This could mean they were themselves *"apostles"* in the general sense, as were Barnabas, James the brother of Jesus, and others (Acts 14:14; Gal 1:19). It seems more likely, however, that these saints were highly regarded by the Apostles for their *"work's sake."*

We know such people did exist -- people who were held in high regard by the Apostles. John wrote to *"the elect lady"* and *"Gaius,"* both of whom he held in high regard (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Just as God does not regard all of His children alike, so the Apostles did not look at every child of God as having equal value. **All were received. All were loved. But there were some who excelled, and they were duly honored.** There are still people who *"labor more abundantly than they all"* (1 Cor 15:10). There is no reason why you

Paul means they were Jews, of the same fleshly stock as himself. While he placed no confidence in the flesh, and did not regard the saints after the flesh, yet he was careful to give honor to those whose lineage went back to Abraham

together. The Lord Jesus said, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"* (Matt 5:11-12). How fitting it would be to remind one another of that reality when experiencing that very persecution!

If it is a treasure to enjoy the *"fellowship"* of Christ's *"sufferings"* (Phil 3:10), it should not surprise us if great benefits are realized when brethren suffer for the name of Jesus together. Such fellowship is of great value.

OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES

" . . . who are of note among the apostles." Other versions read, *"who are outstanding among the apostles,"* ^{NASB/NIV} *"they are prominent among the apostles,"* ^{NRSV} and *"They are respected among the*

cannot aspire to be such an one.

Some are of the opinion these were among *"the seventy"* that Jesus sent out *"two by two,"* into every city and place where He would go (Lk 10:1).

I am careful to once again point out that we are being taught **how** to regard, and **how** to speak of, those who are in Christ Jesus. We should avoid stereotyped ways of looking at the people of God.

IN CHRIST BEFORE ME

" . . . who also were in Christ before me." Here is a most considerate view of fellow believers. In ranking, Paul was among the Apostles, who were "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28). However, here is a sense in which Andronicus and Junia had the advantage over him: they were *"in Christ before"* him. They had been exposed to the grace of God longer than himself, seeing the truth concerning

Christ Jesus before he did.

It is one thing for that to be the case. It is quite another for it to be thankfully acknowledged by the premier Apostle! That acknowledgment indicates they had advanced in the faith, and were bringing

benefit to the saints.

One has reminded us that it is a great privilege to come to Christ early, thereby delivering us from many sins and transgressions. ^{JOHN GILL} It will serve to promote humility among the saints to

acknowledge those who have been sitting at the table longer, and feasting on the riches of God's grace for a more lengthy period. Such are worthy of due recognition, and it will strengthen and encourage them to hear it acknowledged. Of course, it is assumed such souls have been active.

AMPLIAS, MY BELOVED

⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Again, this is our only reference to this believer. Because his name is Roman, we assume he was a citizen of Rome. His name means "enlarged," and appears to accurately

describe his spiritual condition. Paul is particularly endeared to this good brother, calling him "my beloved," "most loved to me," ^{DRA} or "who is dear to me in the Lord." ^{BBE} His closeness to Paul implies it was not upon the basis of fleshly

relationship, or any other natural cause. It was because of his identity with the Lord Jesus. That is what gives people their true worth. While it is desirable that every believer be so noted, the truth of the matter is that some excel in this area.

URBANUS AND STACHYS

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

URBANUS

It is understood that this was a common name among slaves within certain households. The name means

had joined in the actual doing of the work of the Lord. Urbanus had assisted Paul, joining in his labors, and thus bringing relief and encouragement to him.

Just as there were specialized "workers" in the building of the Temple, so there are in the work of Christ. In preparing for the work of building the

This circumstance is even more true with the work of Christ, where a building is being erected to be "the habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph 2:22). Those who put their hand to the work are "fellow workers," and will be duly recognized.

STACHYS

This is a Greek name, meaning a head, or ear of grain – something that is growing and has great potential. Church tradition says he also was one of the seventy, and was the bishop of Byzantium. Whatever his role in the body of Christ, he was very dear and close to the Apostle, and thus he sent special salutations to him.

Fearing that I may be redundant in saying this, I again call attention to the manner in which Paul refers to brethren in Christ Jesus. He does not cite their earthly credentials, if they possessed any. He recognizes no political entities, or those who have attained to a great name. His sole source of reference is the Lord Jesus and His work. **Also, note the total absence of religious and academic titles, which our contemporaries are so fond of using.** It is obvious Paul had a different set of values.

Were professed Christians to follow

He recognizes no political entities, or those who have attained to a great name. His sole source of reference is the Lord Jesus and His work. Also, note the total absence of religious and academic titles, which our contemporaries are so fond of using.

"polite" and "of the city." Whatever his social background, he is appropriately called "our fellow worker" or "helper" ^{KJV} in Christ." Other believers so designated include Timothy (Rom 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Aquila and Priscilla (Rom 16:3), and Clement (Phil 4:3). These, like Urbanus, or "Urbane," ^{KJV} were noted for having their hand on the plow (Lk 9:62). They

Temple, David selected "workers" in abundance. He told Solomon there were "hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number" (1 Chron 22:15-16). The work was large and important, and thus many hands were necessary to accomplish it.

this example, there would be a dramatic reduction in the number of popular Christian leaders and personalities. Some professed Christians are noted for their

expertise in earthly matters, some for entertainment, and others for athletics. You will note a total absence of such references in this passage.

Men should be recognized in strict and consistence accordance with the great work of redemption. That is how heaven views them, and we do well to to the same.

APELLES, ARISTOBULUS, HERODION, AND NARCISSUS

“¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.” With great care, Paul continues to mention godly clusters of people. They may have been despised in the world, but they were honored in heaven, and thus were duly recognized by Paul, who himself trafficked in heavenly places.

APELLES

“Greet Apelles, approved in Christ.” Apelles is a Latin name, and means “called.” How will the Apostle refer to this precious soul? He does not disappoint us, but reaches into his bag to bring something out that is new in this listing. He declares Apelles to be “*approved in Christ.*” I gather that this word is not used in a general redemptive sense, as being “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6). This word is rather one of distinction, reflecting that Apelles had proved himself in the work of the Lord, and thus met with the special commendation of the Lord. It is used in the sense of 2 Corinthians 10:18: “*For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth*” (2 Cor 10:18).

This kind of approval is also applied to Timothy. “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*”^{NASB} (2 Tim 2:15). It is also used of those who were prospective deacons, who *must* “*first be proved,*” then use the office of the deacon (1

Tim 3:10).

Apelles had apparently proved his worth in the crucible of Kingdom labors, where he was steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Such souls should be recognized, for they have brought great glory to the Lord, and encouragement to His people.

ARISTOBULUS

“Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.” The name “*Aristobulus*” means “best counsellor.” We know nothing of this man, except that his household was worthy of a special Apostolic salutation. For whatever it is worth, Josephus maintains this man was the grandson of Herod. Even if this was true, it apparently was not significant to Paul, for he regarded no man after the flesh.

Some households were greeted in their entirety, such as those of Stephanas (1 Cor

Perhaps he was not. Yet, even if this was the case, the Apostle acknowledged those within that household who knew the Lord.

HERODION

“Greet Herodion, my countryman.” This was a kinsman according to the flesh. I gather the relationship was more that of a Jew than of a particular family. Perhaps Herodion was from the same tribe of Benjamin. At any rate, this good brother had embraced the Savior that was born of the Jews, claiming the promises made to that nation. He was thus advantaged by all of the good things God had done for the Jews.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF NARCISSUS

“Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.” Here again, a household is mentioned with no immediate indication that its head was in the Lord. Yet, those who were “*in the Lord*”

This word is rather one of distinction, reflecting that Apelles had proved himself in the work of the Lord, and thus met with the special commendation of the Lord.

1:16) and Onesiphorus (2 Tim 4:19). But here, only believers within that household were greeted. We should not take this to be a reproach to Aristobulus. Rather, it is a tribute to those who stood for Christ even though some within their household did not. Paul does not say this man was in Christ.

were especially greeted, without fear of offending any that were not. It was necessary that those who occupied the same household with unbelievers be encouraged in the Lord. Their earthly circumstance was not ideal, and therefore especially required they be encouraged in the Lord.

TRYPHENA, TYPHOSA, PERSIS, AND REFUS

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

labored much in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” The Apostle

continues in an impressive recognition of Kingdom laborers. All of this attests to the uniqueness of the brethren in Rome.

Their faith had been broadcast throughout the world, and this listing confirms why. There are a number of prodigious laborers in Rome who were spending and being spent for Christ.

TRYPHENA AND TYPHOSA

“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord.” Other versions read, *“who labor in the Lord,”* ^{KJV} *“workers in the Lord,”* ^{NASB} and *“those women who work hard in the Lord.”* ^{NIV}

How comely that there should be two women, working together for the honor of the Lord and the benefit of His people. It seems to me that it is honorable to seek for the surfacing of such ladies in our day.

PERSIS

“Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.” This was also a woman, like Tryphena and Typhosa, noted for her work in the Lord. However, this woman excelled in her efforts,

in Mark 15:21, whose father, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to carry the cross of Christ. If this is the case, it is an unusual testimony of the power that attended the presence of the Lord – even when He was on the way to be crucified.

By saying Rufus was *“chosen in the Lord,”* the Apostle accented the excellent spiritual quality that attended this man. Paul had personal acquaintance with him, and considered him to be a choice believer, rising above the ordinary. I understand that Paul’s perception of this man was not the result of a special revelation from God, but through observing his godly demeanor and involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Such recognition is similar to that of Paul for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:4-5).

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

“... and his mother and mine.” The NIV gives the sense of the text: “and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.” She had been a literal mother to Rufus, and a figurative one to Paul. Rufus was a Gentile, Paul was a Jew. Also, Paul from another part of the world, which forbids us to conclude he and Rufus were fleshly brothers, having the same mother.

When her ministry to Paul took place, we do not know. She did, however, conduct herself with great care toward him, as a mother would for her own offspring. The tenderness of Paul is seen in this language. He did not forget those who had ministered to him, particularly those who did so in a matronly way. In this matter, Paul emulated the spirit of the Savior, who said, *“Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”* (Matt 12:49-50). Spiritual relationships are superior ones.

This might very well be the “Rufus” mentioned in Mark 15:21, whose father, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to carry the cross of Christ. If this is the case, it is an unusual testimony of the power that attended the presence of the Lord – even when He was on the way to be crucified.

Here were two women, noted for their hard work for the Lord Jesus! Again, there are many assemblies in which such women would not be welcomed. The name *“Tryphena”* means “luxurious,” and the name *“Tryphosa”* means “luxuriating.” Both names come from the same root, and mean living in luxury. These were probably sisters, perhaps even twins. Early church writers say they were noble women of Iconium. Their presence in the Apostolic salutations will stretch the thinking of some. Perhaps they ministered to the sick and needy, or played a role similar to that of Phebe. We do not know. It may be surmised that they were single, especially devoting their attention to *“the things of the Lord,”* how they might *“please the Lord,”* as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:32.

laboring *“much in the Lord.”* She abounded in the work of the Lord, and was full of good works. Thus, a special greeting is given to her. As with the Tryphena and Typhosa, this is the only place she is mentioned. **In all three cases, the only thing we know about them is good. There is nothing questionable said about them. Oh, that such could be said of us!**

RUFUS

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord.” Other versions read, *“a choice man in the Lord,”* ^{NASB} *“eminent in the Lord,”* ^{RSV} *“the choice one in the Lord,”* ^{NLT} and *“whom the Lord picked out to be His very own.”* ^{NLT} *“Rufus”* is understood to have been a rather common name among slaves. This might very well be the *“Rufus”* mentioned

ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON, HERMAS, PATROBAS, HERMES, PHILOLOGUS, JULIA, NEREUS AND OLYMPAS

“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.” Here are two clusters of brethren, together with those associated with them. It is to be

assumed their relationship centered in some form of mutual activity in the Lord. When the people of God are **not** known after the flesh, it is because they are

viewed from a high vantage point, and in regard to a higher calling. The greeting that is extended to them is not social, but spiritual – i.e., in the Lord.

THE FIRST GROUP

“Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.” We know nothing more of these men through Scripture. **Church historians say the following.**

As to their former lives, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Asyncritus may have been a freed slave from the house of Augustus.
- ▣ Hermas is thought to have been a Roman slave.
- ▣ Patromas is considered to have been a freed slave from Nero’s house.
- ▣ Hermes was also considered to have been a Roman slave.

As to their lives in Christ, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Asyncritus may have been one of *“the seventy,”* sent out by Jesus, and is said to have been the bishop of Hycrania.
- ▣ Hermas may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Marathon.
- ▣ Patrobas may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Puteoli.
- ▣ Hermes may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Dalmatia.

THE SECOND GROUP

“Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” Again, nothing more is known of these saints in the Scriptures.

As to their former lives, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Philologus and Julia may have been husband and wife slaves in the household of Julius Ceasar.
- ▣ Nereus and his sister are also considered to have been slaves in the Imperial household.

As to their lives in Christ, church historians suggest the following.

We must learn from such passages to carefully consider the people of God, avoiding beholding them through the lense of the flesh.

- ▣ Philologus and Julia were husband and wife, with Philologus being reckoned among *“the seventy,”* and also said to be the bishop of Sinope.
- ▣ Olympas is said to have been numbered with *“the seventy,”* and was also a Roman martyr.

THE PAULINE RECOGNITION

After a cursory recognition of the opinions of church historians, Paul’s recognition of these saints is of particular interest to me. First, they apparently represent two clusters of believers, called *“the brethren who are with them.”* This means three separate groups are recognized in Rome. (1. The church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. (2. The brethren with Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and (3. The brethren with Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. We have no idea of the size of these groups, but they are all recognized and greeted with dignity and affection. They were not ranked by size or prominence, or considered splinter groups of a “mother church.”

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF

MENTIONING THEM

The fact that these precious souls are mentioned in the Scriptures has provoked many to earnestly seek to identify them. Whether or not they have uncovered genuine facts concerning their identity is not of any momentous value. However, the fact that they engaged in such an effort is worthy of notation.

Anyone recognized by heaven, and, by inspiration, incuded in the Scriptures, is, by virtue of that inclusion, significant. What they have done is recognized by God, but only because they themselves have been received into His fellowship. There is a certain spiritual dignity associated with being received by God. Such souls are worthy of saluation and commendation. They are worthy of encouragement and prayers. Whether or not they are recognized by the world, or have attained to any degree of earthly status is entirely without significance. Their total worth is based upon their participation in the *“great salvation”* of God.

This is precisely why men highly lauded by the world are not mentioned in Scripture, and men lauded in Scripture are not included in worldly history and commentary.

We must learn from such passages to carefully and thoughtfully consider the people of God, avoiding beholding them through the lense of the flesh.

ONE ANOTHER AND THE CHURCHES

“¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” The emphasis in this text is on *“holy,”* **not** *“kiss.”* Those with an

inclination to law and precise procedures read this text as though it was a procedural directive. As with all of our relationships with the people of God, this

is addressed to the heart, which is to drive our external manners.

THE KISS

Among the Jews, it was customary to kiss one another as a token of deep family ties. Thus Isaac entreated Jacob to come close and kiss him (Gen 27:26). Laban mentioned kissing his sons and daughters (Gen 31:28). When Elisha left all to follow the prophet Elijah, he first requested permission to go home and kiss his father and mother farewell (1 Kgs 19:20). When Esau was reunited with Jacob, he ran forward and kissed him (Gen 33:5). When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he kissed them all (Gen 45:15). When Joseph saw his aged father Jacob again, he fell before him, wept over him, and kissed him (Gen 50:1). When the prodigal son was depicted as returning to his father, his father fell on his neck and kissed him (Lk 15:20). When Aaron went to the mount of God at the direction of the Lord, he kissed his brother Moses (Ex 4:27). **The kiss was, therefore, a recognized token of close family ties.**

It was also a token of abiding friendship. Jonathan and David are said to have kissed each other (1 Sam 20:41). This is the kind of kiss Judas pretended to give to Jesus when he betrayed him – the kiss of a friend (Matt 26:49-50).

This was not a romantic kiss, placed upon the mouth, as in Song of Solomon 1:2). Rather, it was placed in the region of the neck and cheek. Thus Esau fell on Jacob's neck and kissed him (Gen 33:4). The prodigal's father also fell on his neck and kissed him (Lk 15:20). When Paul left the elders from Ephesus, they also fell on his neck and kissed him (Acts 20:37).

REETING ONE ANOTHER

First, it is important to *"greet one another"* – to recognize the members of the household of faith, to which we have been joined by the grace of God. To *"greet"* is to *"salute,"* welcome, embrace, or enfold with the arms as one that is precious. It means to bid welcome, receive joyfully, and wish well.

However, our greetings are not to be mere religious formalities. In this text, the Spirit is not ordaining a lifeless ceremony. Rather, He is awakening brotherly love, and the public display of it. If God is not ashamed to be called our God (Heb 11:16), and Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb 2:11), we certainly ought

not to be ashamed of one another. **Whatever form of greeting we use, it should be "holy," distinct from the manner in which we greet, or salute, those who are of the world.**

Confirming the *"holy kiss"* is more than a mere custom or empty formality, Peter refers to *"a kiss of charity"* (1 Pet 5:14). In three other places, Paul mentions *"an holy kiss"* (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26).

A *"holy kiss"* is not only one that conveys the idea of the individual being especially close to the our heart, but which also carries a desire for the blessing of the individual. In it, the one who is kissed is recognized as a member of the body of Christ, justified from sin, and possessing an inheritance in heaven. This distinguishes it from a kiss of lust and unchasteness.

By the end of the first century, historians tell us the church practiced the *"holy kiss"* before participating in the Lord's Supper. ^{JUSTIN MARYR} While this does not justify the forming of a law to be bound upon the followers of Jesus, it does reveal something of how our text was understood. The *"holy kiss"* was not considered to be a mere casual greeting, but one related with our identity with Jesus Christ. It was a means of confessing the superior relationship we have with one another in Christ Jesus.

Contemporary Practices

I have been in congregations where a greeting time had been established during the formal gathering. During this time, brethren would mingle with the others, greeting one another, welcoming strangers, etc. As a rule, I have noted that very little spiritual conversation occurred during such times. Recognition of one another tended to be more on a neighborly or friendly basis. There is certainly nothing wrong with displays of civility and neighborliness among the saints. However, that is not the point of this text. Whatever place may be assigned to such greetings, it cannot take the place of a hearty recognition of those who are in Christ Jesus.

Another form of recognizing those who have tasted of the grace of God, is the

right hand of fellowship. Paul mentioned such a kingdom formality in Galatians 2:9. *"And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship."* This was a sort of pledge to solidly stand behind one another, recognizing the work to which they had been called. Job would call it striking hands together (Job 17:3). Solomon would refer to it as being surety, or security, for your friend (Prov 6:1). Ezekiel referred to the procedure as confirming a covenant (Ezek 17:13).

The point is that even in greeting one another, we should zealously avoid casualness and viewing the saints of God after the flesh. Spiritually insightful greetings have often been a great source of consolation to weary warriors.

As to actually kissing one another in our salutations, there is certainly nothing wrong with it, and everything right about it. But the kiss had better be *"holy,"* and never a means of inciting lust. It is to be driven by a recognition of the saints of God, and not by the binding of a social custom.

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

"The churches of Christ salute you." In their quest to call their assemblies by Bible names, some have viewed this admonition as revealing a valid, and even preferable, name for a local congregation. Nothing could be further from the truth. In this text, the Spirit has no regard whatsoever for the name by which an assembly is known.

In this expression, Paul is saying, *"All of the other assemblies who are in Christ Jesus recognize and greet you in the Lord."* This is the recognition of the *"whole family in heaven and earth"* (Eph 3:15) on a congregational level. They all have common interests, and acknowledge all other believers. If it was a larger assembly in Rome, or the church meeting in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, *"All the churches of Christ send greetings."*^{NIV} They acknowledge you, and desire the best in Christ for you all!

Bound Together

In this admonition and salutation,

the Spirit is moving Paul to promote “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:3). That kind of unity (which is the

only kind God recognizes), begins with a recognition of the saints, and the acceptance of them in Christ Jesus. It is a

sin of great magnitude to use these words to promote sectarian interests, or place limitations on the people of God.

CONCLUSION

As with all of Scripture, the passage we have reviewed has a spirit. There is a particular direction in which it is pointed, and a specific purpose that it serves. The due recognition and honoring of the people of God is a tributary of a greater river. The “*great salvation*” of God includes our relationship to the people of God as well as God Himself. Thus it is written, “*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and **everyone who loves Him who***

begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

There is something refreshing about recognizing and honoring those who are in Christ Jesus – all of them. It is as though the Lord blesses those who acquiesce to His marvelous work. When we receive His people, we receive Him. When we minister to His people, we minister to Him. It is good to have a holy

resolve to be give honor to all of God’s people. If it is a sister in Christ, doing a good work like Phoebe, assist her. If it is a holy couple who have inconvenienced their lives for the sake of Christ and His people, give them greeting and honor. If it is a congregation meeting in a home, receive them and pray for them. If you know anyone who was the first to come to Christ from their family, a region, or a town, give them due honor.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/14/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 17-20 of the sixteenth chapter. The theme will be, “**HOW TO HANDLE DIVISION AND HERESY.**” The body of Christ is regularly subjected to Satanic and fleshly influences. These seek to divide the people of God, and introduce corrupt thinking into their minds. This test will confirm that such advances are not to be ignored. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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