

Greetings
Romans 16:5-16
ABC 11/19/17

Fame has been defined as *the condition of being known or talked about by many people, especially on account of notable achievements.*¹ It can be for something good or for something bad. Fame has to do with being remembered. Someone anonymous once wrote, *You will know that you are truly famous when a crazy person imagines he is you.* The desire to be remembered is something every person has, to one degree or another, whether it is to be remembered by your company, your peers, your classmates, your parents, or your kids. None of us want to be forgotten. The desire to be remembered is the human impulse behind all halls of fame. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of halls of fame. For example there are halls of fame for: football, baseball, basketball, soccer, hockey, boxing, swimming, bowling, volleyball, distance running, wrestling, golf, bicycling, nurses, aviation, astronauts, rock & roll, country music, gospel music, fishing, inventors, science & technology, teachers, quilters, & clowns! As we come return to Rom 16, we discover one name after another listed to be forever remembered in God's Word. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to recognize many people, thus immortalizing their names. This wasn't because they were brilliant or athletic or funny or talented or creative, but because they served the Bride of Christ, the church, which was purchased by His own blood. Paul names one after another, placing their names into Scripture with minimal explanation, if any at all. But it's enough to teach deep, profound, & encouraging truths to us all. Notice that one phrase keeps coming up here, besides the word **greet**. The phrase appears in vs 2 as, **in the Lord**. It appears again:

in Christ Jesus (vs 3)

in Christ (vs 7)

in the Lord (vs 8)

in Christ (vss 9-10)

in the Lord (vss 11, 12, & 13)

These people are worth remembering because they are in the family of faith. They were citizens of Rome, but belonged to Jesus. The book of Romans began by showing us men & women living in condemnation; the last chapter shows us individuals living **in Christ**. Paul concludes his

¹ Dictionary.com

magnificent letter by rattling off a list of individuals, many who have names that are hard to pronounce. Frankly, this seems like an odd way to end a letter as doctrinal & deep as Romans. Why does God bother to use precious space in His written revelation for greetings? There are at least 3 reasons:

1. To show us that God cares about individuals & knows them by name. God loves people deeply. Jesus Himself is the Good Shepherd, whose **the sheep hear His voice, & He calls His own sheep by name & leads them out** (Jn 10:3). If Jesus cares so much about people, we should as well.
2. To demonstrate that God keeps records on His people, noting the areas in which they've given faithful service. Some of you have visited the Pearl Harbor or Vietnam Memorial. We often honor people for their sacrifices by including them in earthly memorials. God honored these faithful people by including them in His Word, which will never pass away (Mt 5:18).
3. To show us that people of all backgrounds, race, social status, & education are of equal importance to God & to His church. In this list of people Paul includes singles, married couples, men & women, slaves & social elites, Greeks, Romans, & Jews. This list describes God's diverse heart for His church. It portrays a taste of heaven!

Let's pick our study up in Rom 16 & look at the faithful servants listed here.

1. Epäenetüs 5b There were thousands of converts to Christ in Asia, what we know as Turkey. However, Paul remembered the very 1st person who told him, *I accept Jesus as my Savior. I believe He has risen from the dead & is the very Son of God. I accept His sacrifice alone as payment for the guilt of my sin.* Epäenetüs wasn't just the 1st convert in Asia. Paul uses the word *first-fruits* here. Just as an offering was given to God from the *first-fruits*, expecting the rest of the harvest would come in, so also Paul calls Epäenetüs the *first-fruits*. In other words, he was the 1st convert but he wasn't going to be the last. There were Gentiles from that whole area who were going to come to Christ. He was just a foretaste of the conversions that were to come. It reminds us of William Carey who went to India & ministered 7 years as a missionary before he saw his 1st convert. When the 1st person came to the Lord, Carey said to his friends, *He may be the 1st, but*

*there's a continent behind him.*² Epāenetus was the 1st & perhaps it's God's irony that his name means *praiseworthy*.³ Without a doubt, this man would signal the gospel reception which would bring praise to God from the lips of millions of believers the world over, who would discover in Christ their redemption & give Him praise. Epāenetus would be the 1st, but he was only the beginning.

2. Mary 6 We don't know exactly which Mary this was. There are at least 5 Marys mentioned in the NT:

- Mary, the mother of the Lord;
- Mary Magdalene;
- Mary, the sister of Martha & Lazarus;
- Mary, the wife of Clopas;
- Mary, the mother of John Mark.

Whoever this Mary is, she was a tireless worker. The word Paul uses can be translated, worn out, to grow weary, or to work with great effort.⁴ The same word is used in Jn 4:6, where we read that Jesus was wearied from His journey. It's the word used by Peter after Jesus told him & the others to drop their nets one more time to catch fish. Peter responded, **Master, we worked hard all night & caught nothing** (Lk 5:5). We don't know anything about Mary except that she received her induction into this hall of faithful, not because she accomplished some great deed, we aren't even told what she did, but because she worked hard at doing it. Perhaps she came early & left late. Perhaps she set up, cleaned up, & locked up. The spirit & determination of Mary is behind most things that happen in church, even 2,000 years later. Paul remembered Mary & how hard she worked. He recognized her for her service for the glory of God.

3. Andronicus & Junias 7

Over the years there's been much debate whether Junias is referring to a male or female. The Greek can be translated either way. I believe the NAS got it right & they are husband & wife. Whatever the case, we do know 4 things about them, based on what Paul wrote. Paul said they...

A. Were in Christ before me. That means they were saved before Paul was on the Damascus road.

² Quoted by Ligon Duncan, www.fpcjackson.org

³ <http://biblehub.com/topical/e/epaenetus.htm>

⁴ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, p 384

B. Were outstanding among the apostles. What does this mean? Were they both apostles? Were there female apostles? The word **apostle** is used in different ways in the NT. The Greek word simply means sent one or commissioned messenger. This could refer to anyone sent or commissioned by the church or Jesus to go & take the gospel to others. Barnabas was called an apostle in Acts 14:4, even though he wasn't considered 1 of the 12 Apostles (capital A). The office of Apostle was closed by this time. The generic usage of the word occurs to refer to faithful ones sent as evangelists or missionaries. This was most likely a husband & wife missionary team who advanced the gospel. In fact, Paul wrote that they were **outstanding!** They excelled in their ministry. Paul continues to say of Andronicus & Junias that it wasn't always easy, as he calls them...

C. My fellow prisoners. Literally, war captives or even prisoners of war. Since Paul spent a lot of time in jail, it's impossible to know if they were in prison with him or if they were imprisoned for the same reason as he was, but at different times & places. Whatever the case, they had a special bond. Paul also said they were...

D. My kinsmen. This is probably a reference to the fact that they were Jews. We know more about these 2 than most in this list, but we still don't know much. But Paul was grateful for them.

4. Ampliatus 8 The word **beloved** 1st appears in the Greek translation of Gen 22. Abraham was told by the Lord to go & **take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, ... offer him there as a burnt offering** (22:2). This is the same word that came from heaven after Jesus was baptized by John. God the Father said, *You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased* (Mk 1:11). The same word is used by Paul here in reference to Ampliatus. Ampliatus was a common name for slaves in 1st century records. In fact, the name appears on an ancient catacomb in the cemetery of the Domitilla family. The inscriptions clearly indicate that members of this prominent Roman family were followers of Christ.⁵ It seems that Ampliatus was one of the servants belonging to this household. In the catacombs is a highly decorated tomb with the single name *Ampliatus*, carved in decorative lettering. Romans had first, middle, & last names, like most of

⁵ Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans*, p 516

us, but slaves had only one. The elaborate tomb indicates that Ampliatus was a man of high rank & respect in the church, as well as within this family. I'd love to be able to read the biography of Ampliatus. We know, from the early days of the church, as one author wrote, *distinctions of rank were so completely wiped out that it was possible for a man at the same time to be a slave in some household & a leader in the church.*⁶

5. Urbanus 9a His name means *polite*. It gives us our English word *urbane*, which means to be smooth & polished in manners. This is every parent's fantasy for their kid's behavior when company comes, right? That their kids will miraculously be smooth & polished in manners in front of others. It's possible Urbanus was a man of rank & social standing. However, Paul specifically mentions, not his social standing, but his servanthood. Paul writes that Urbanus is **our fellow worker in Christ**. This is the same word Paul used of Prisca & Aquila, when he wrote, **my fellow workers** in vs 3. Urbanus is included here, not because of his rank or standing, but because he came alongside & helped. He loved to help! He was known for being a helper. *What did you do today, Urbanus?*

I helped the church body.

What do you normally do?

I look around for things that need doing & I do them.

This was a man who was remembered by Paul, by God, & by us, simply because he helped!

6. Stachys 9b Paul refers to Stachys using this wonderfully tender word again, **beloved**. But that's all we know. Paul loved him.

Apelles 10a Apelles is **approved**! Paul used this word in Rom 14 to refer to the mature believer who was sensitive about the conscience of his weaker brother. This was the believer who was willingly giving up something in order to protect the weaker believer from sinning. Perhaps Apelles was one who took the lead in the difficulty of debatable things. Paul also used this word in 1 Cor 11:19, when he wrote, **there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you**. Perhaps Apelles was a mature man who responded

⁶ William Barclay, *Letter to the Romans*, p 212

with wisdom & maturity in the midst of church conflict. Something was causing division & unrest in the Corinthian church. Paul said, *This is a wonderful time to identify leaders, those who are mature believers. They will respond to the conflict with grace & tact & insight, where the immature believer will only add fuel to the fire of division.* Perhaps Apelles was one of the men who rose to the surface as the Roman church struggled with the division between Jews & Gentiles. Apelles distinguished himself perhaps with his wise counsel & humble spirit. He was thus **approved**. There's one other use of this word by Paul that I'll mention. It's found in his 2nd letter to Timothy, when he wrote, **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2:15).** Perhaps it was this mark of Apelles that impressed Paul, that he loved to study & interpret the Scriptures. Perhaps it was all of these. Apelles might have been an elder in the church, given the fact that he dealt wisely with conflict in the church, interpreted the Scriptures with diligence, & led the way with regard to the younger believers in the congregation who were struggling with what was right & what was wrong. Of course, this is all speculation. But we do know he was **approved in Christ**.

8. Household of Aristobulus 10b This phrase could refer not only to the family of Aristobulus, but to his servants, which seems to be the case here. It could correctly be interpreted, *Greet those belonging to Aristobulus.* Paul doesn't greet Aristobulus, but those who belong to him. We're helped in regard to this wealthy man's identity by historical accounts of him. He was the grandson of Herod the Great, the same Herod who ordered the killing all the Jewish boys 2 years & under in & around Bethlehem in his attempt to kill Jesus. Aristobulus lived as a private citizen of Rome & was later, a personal friend of Claudius, the emperor who expelled the Jews from Rome. When he died, his servants & property became the property of the Emperor, but retained his name, as was the custom of that day.⁷ The fact that Aristobulus' servants became the property of the Emperor would explain the reason why Paul mentions ...

⁷ Barclay, p 213

9. Herodion 11a Paul specifically refers to Herodion, as **my kinsman**; that is, my Jewish brother. A Jewish man wouldn't have taken on the name of Herod, unless he was a member of Caesar's household as one of the servants.

10. Household of Narcissus 11b Literally, *Greet those belonging to the household of Narcissus; those servants who are believers in the Lord*. Evidently, not all of the servants were believers & Paul was specifically addressing those who were. Once again, the name *Narcissus* was a common name in Rome during the days of Paul. However, there's the implication of the household or the properties of Narcissus, which implies a transference to the royal family upon the death of Narcissus, whom Paul doesn't address. It's possible this was the powerful personal secretary to the emperor Claudius. He amassed a private fortune by his influence over the Roman emperor. His power & fortune came because all correspondence addressed to the Emperor had to pass through his hands & never reached Claudius unless he allowed it to do so. He made his fortune from the bribes people paid him to ensure their petitions were sent on to the Emperor.⁸ When Claudius was murdered & Nero ascended the throne, Narcissus was exposed for his corruption & put to death. His household then became the possession of Nero.⁹ This seems to be the answer to the question of how the gospel of Christ come into the highest reaches of political power so Paul could later write to the Philippians, while he was in Rome, **All the saints greet you, & especially those of the household of Caesar** (4:22). Who were the saints in Caesar's palace? Possibly the converted slaves of Aristobulus & Narcissus. The royal sons & daughters of Jesus who were written into this Hall of Fame. Though serving in the palace of a temporary & brutal king, they were members of the immortal Household of Faith, who ultimately belonged to the King of Kings.

11. Tryphaena & Tryphosa 12a Scholars believe these are twin sisters, given the poetic nature of their names. Their names come from the same root word¹⁰ & can be translated as *dainty* & *delicate*.¹¹ However, Paul uses the same word for **work** that he used earlier for Mary. Tryphaena &

⁸ Ibid, p 213

⁹ RCH Lenski, *Interpretation of Romans*, p 909

¹⁰ Woodrow Knoll, *Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, p 240

¹¹ Lenski, p 910

Tryphosa may have been named *dainty & delicate* but they labored hard for the work of the Lord & are remembered for it.

12. Persis 12b Most believe Persis was the older sister of Tryphaena & Tryphosa. However, in her case, Paul writes in the past tense, **has worked hard in the Lord**. This is an implication she's elderly & can no longer work as hard as she once did. Her previous labor for the Lord was worthy of commendation. There are different seasons of life where our service for God changes. That's normal & good. As we age & can no longer do what we once did, it allows those who are younger to step up & serve God actively, working hard for His glory. How hard are you working for Him?

13. Rufus & his mother 13 Perhaps 2 of the most intriguing people here are **Rufus & his mother**. Although Rufus was a common name, there's evidence that this Rufus was one of the 2 sons of Simon the Cyrenian who was forced to carry Jesus' cross on the way to His crucifixion. Mark wrote his gospel account a few years after Paul wrote this letter to the Roman believers. Mark's gospel was also directed primarily to the Roman world. It's fascinating & not surprising that Mark would be the only gospel writer who would give one detail the other gospel writers leave out. Matthew & Luke record that Simon was compelled to carry Christ's cross. But when Mark gives this account, he adds the fact that Simon was the father of Alexander & Rufus (Mk 15:21). Why? Because the believers in Rome knew about Simon & they knew who Rufus was, but they might not have known that Simon was the father of Rufus. We also have mention of Simon of Cyrene serving in the early church in Antioch. There's little doubt by any commentator or Bible historian that I've read that Simon became a believer in the Lamb of God whose cross he carried. There's also little doubt that his son Rufus became a believer as well & served in the church at Rome. Paul writes, *Tell Rufus & his mother hello!* In fact, Paul affectionately refers to this woman as his own mother. This is a reference to the fact that Paul knew her & had been ministered to by her.

14. Ten Servants Paul crams 10 more people into his greetings without any description of them whatsoever. They are listed in 2 groups of 5. **14**

Evidently this is a house church gathered together. In vs 15, Paul continues, **15**

It's possible Philologus & Julia were a husband & wife, & Nereus & his sister were their children. Most believe Olympas was a member of their household. In other words, Paul is greeting all the believers who are gathered in their home. With this, Paul closes his personal greetings of warmth & affection. He then commands all of them to show affection & love to one another, as he writes **16.**

15. Holy Kiss Most of us probably put this in the category of things they used to do back then that we don't have to do today. The usual interpretation is that the holy kiss itself isn't important. The greeting is the thing, we're told. It doesn't really matter how you do it. Back then it was a holy kiss. Today it's a handshake. Same thing. Now that seems right until you think about it. A kiss is not the same thing as a handshake. Just ask any teenager. In the Bible the holy kiss was a sign of love, respect, friendship & honor. It was a mark of innocent affection. This greeting was a holy kiss, set apart from anything sensual or intimate, but warm & affectionate. Does this mean that in order to obey the Word of God we should all pucker up? The answer isn't quite as simple as it might 1st appear. Let me explain:

A. Every Christian should be willing to obey the Scriptures, exactly as the command is given, right? Simple obedience to God's commands ought to be our desire always & our response most often.

B. There may be reasons that cause us to obey Paul's command in a different way than actually going about kissing one another. 1 Thes 5:22 says, **abstain from every form of evil**. In our culture, kissing means something quite different from what it meant among the Jews of Paul's day. If kissing one another would cause some to stumble or cause unnecessary offense to the gospel, then it may not be the thing to do.

C. When a commanded practice seems to violate the principle on which it was founded, then we should seek to obey in the best way possible, in the way which best fulfills the principle.

D. The fundamental truth underlying our text & Paul's command is that of Christian unity. The command to **greet one another with a holy kiss** is given to assure that unity is demonstrated in the church. The opposite of this is to refuse to receive or greet others, especially those who differ

with us in the matter of convictions (14:1; 15:7). In Paul's day & in his culture, it wasn't the cultural custom of the Greeks or Romans to be physically affectionate. Instead, a Roman greeting would be to clasp forearms with a stranger or friend. This is a modification of the ancient custom of handshaking, which began when a person would extend the hand to show he wasn't holding a dagger. Basically, a handshake was a sign to declare, *I'm not going to slit your throat!* Paul's implied expectation seems to be that believers should be more affection with one another than with those outside God's family. **Greeting one another with a holy kiss** caused Christians to do that which was unnatural & even culturally unacceptable. Some cultures still do this. Argentina

16. Conclusion Here are a few truths we can draw from this list of greetings:

A. Being greeted here & placed into God's Word didn't require great ability, but availability, which is often the greatest ability we can have.

B. Paul's greetings were aimed at those Christians who had labored well, & apparently, behind the scenes. Serving the Lord isn't easy. There are always difficulties & challenges along the way. Encouragement was necessary & was rooted in Christian love. Paul understood his friends & fellow servants needed to be recognized. In our present day, the culture isn't nearly as harsh, but we still need to be encouraged. Like Mary who labored well in Paul's day, we can't overlook the faithful ladies who serve us in a variety of ways. Try to imagine ABC without the faithful ladies who give themselves to serve us all. Likewise, many of you men do your work quietly in the background of ministry. Don't overlook them either. They're all precious in the sight of the Lord.

C. Being inducted in this Hall of Faith didn't require some dramatic act of service, but dependable acts of service. For some of these, it just meant showing up & being counted as one of the children of God!

D. The church was extremely diversified. There were males, females, slaves, freedmen, Jews, Gentiles, well-to-do, & well thought of. Women are mentioned prominently & are described as working hard. House churches are mentioned at least once (5) & probably 3 times (14-15) if not 5 times if including the references to households (10-11).

E. Being greeted by Paul here didn't require being honored by men, but being humble before God. Many of these people were slaves who'd accepted the Savior. Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote that *fame usually comes to those who are thinking of something else*.¹² These people qualified. The truth is, they were thinking of some One else. They were thinking of the Chief Shepherd who came & took upon Himself the form of a servant & became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Being inducted into the Rom 16 Hall of Fame means being conformed into the image of our Great Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does all of this mean to us today? When we look back over this chapter we begin to get a sense of how close these people were to Paul & how much he loved them. He calls them **beloved** & praises them for their faithful service to him & one another & for their labor in the Lord. Do you love other Christians like that, especially people who aren't quite like you? Do you work hard for God's kingdom? In vss 3, 6, 9, & 12, you find phrases about workers. Paul notices the work of Christians. He knows about it, he notices it, he draws attention to it. If Paul knows the work of Christians, you can know there is no work of a Christian which is unnoticed or unrewarded by the Lord. Like Paul, we must get to know our family. How do we get to know one another the way we should? Get into a Growth Group. Get involved. Take the initiative & engage with others.

The next time you're reading through the NT & you see Paul remembering people, let that serve as a reminder that we all should recognize & appreciate others for their work in the service of the Lord. How long would it take to send an e-mail, write a letter, or to speak to them just to say, *I appreciate you & the work you do in serving us at ABC?* Remember those who serve & work for the glory of God.

What have these greetings taught you about the Christian life? Maybe they've shown you the beauty of being in Christ or the commitment of following Jesus & you need to give up on your way of living & come to Christ today. If we can introduce you to our marvelous Savior who has died to pay the penalty for our sins & has given us new & eternal life, please talk with us after the service. We as Christians can share these blessings in life together because we share a

¹² Bob Phillips, *Phillips' Book of Great Thoughts*, p 122

common Savior & the wonderful joy of being rescued from God's wrath & welcomed into His family. We gather every week to celebrate with affection & delight that we've been rescued, our enemy has been defeated, & we've been made friends of God & fellow heirs of the riches of Christ. That should motivate us to encourage & appreciate one another & unite & serve & suffer & persevere together & share love & family affection for each other. You might not have thought it, but even greetings in God's Word are profitable for reproof & correction & training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work. Let's pray.