

Sermons through

Romans

We're in this Together

Romans 16:21-24

With Study Questions

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Romans 16:21-24

Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. 22 I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Romans 16:21-24).

Introduction

There is a great temptation in ministry to get right to business. There was a time I was put in charge of a small group of pastors in order to work through a difficult task. Though we were all Christians pastors, it couldn't be said we were from churches of 'like faith and practice'. That is to say, the theological distinctives of our respective churches were significantly dissimilar.

As the one put in charge, I was concerned that the others might think I viewed my role as primarily pedagogical; as if I were there to straighten them out theologically. I did not think that. The quest of instructing a room full of seasoned pastors before we get things started would have been both unrealistic and arrogant.

Though I think we should always be open to dialogue and correction when it comes to our thoughts of God and how we read the Scriptures, I did not view my role as the instructor. I more viewed my role (at least on this board) as one who would find our common theological ground (and there was plenty of that) and foster a harmony and unity that would make the task before us both pleasant and productive.

One of the ways I sought to achieve this was by going around the room and making (for lack of a better term) small talk. I would ask the men where they grew up, where they went to school, where they live now and other friendly questions. As it turned out, we all had many mutual friends and we found plenty to talk about.

Every meeting would then begin (very naturally) with friendly chatter. One member of the board who entered the process after we'd been meeting for a few months actually expressed frustration that it took us so

long to actually get into the meat of the meeting. He felt like he'd walked into a room of guys who knew each other for years, even though we were only recently introduced to each other.

What I have found is that friendly chatter about light, non-controversial things, makes the transition to things that are perhaps more highly charged, easier and more productive. To establish right up front a disposition that is not adversarial but one of advocacy. Or to put it more simply, to let people know you're on their side.

I mention this because the Apostle Paul, in what many consider to be his magnum opus, spends the better part of an entire chapter on greetings. Until this point, Paul has been greeting those in the church at Rome. Here we read of Christians in Corinth (where Romans was likely written) giving their greetings to the members of the church at Rome.

Even though it might have been sufficiently encouraging for the saints at Rome to be greeted solely by the Apostle, Paul in one sense was just another member of the body. And our encouragement from others and toward others is of great importance.

I had a wonderful opportunity this past week to speak with an elderly saint who I had never met. Well into his nineties, he had recently lost his wife of seventy-three years and had serious health issues himself. He was a pastor and an author who, unbeknownst to him, had significant influence in my ministerial life and the direction of our entire church. His name is G.I. Williamson and he is friends with Bill Shishko, who recently preached in our church. When I shared with Pastor Shishko the influence Williamson had on our church he recommended I call Pastor Williamson.

I wasn't sure how welcomed the phone call would be. But I also realized that the opportunity was not going to last forever. I dialed the number and he answered the phone. After identifying myself, and offering my condolences, I wanted to be sensitive to his schedule and asked him if it was a bad time. He said I had seven minutes. I briefly shared the great influence his writings had on me and our church. I began to detect a tenderness in his response. He told me this information had warmed his heart. Pastor Shishko called me a couple of days later to express how Williamson had been encouraged. It was a brief but very sweet encounter.

We should not underestimate the value of our thoughtful greetings toward one another. We should try to be good at it. Paul gives a list of people who were sending their greetings to the saints at Rome. Some of them are easily identified and some are not. I don't intend to go into great

detail about each person but rather will touch lightly upon how these saints are described, that we might learn and imitate them.

Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you (Romans 16:21).

Workers and Countrymen

First we see Timothy, to whom Paul had written two pastoral epistles. Timothy (half Jewish, half Greek Acts 16:1) was Paul's young protégé in the ministry (1 Corinthians 4:17) and likely his closest co-worker. Paul offers a wonderful testimony regarding Timothy in his letter to the Philippians; words which express how it might feel for me one day when the church considers its next pastor.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. 23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me (Philippians 2:19-23).

What a brilliant commendation! Here Paul simply refers to Timothy as his **"fellow worker"** *synergos*. Ministry is work. It is, at times, joyous and at other times difficult and heart-breaking. Sometimes it goes smoothly and other times there are rocks in the field and thorns in the flesh. Some people are in full-time ministry and others may honor God by being excellent at whatever their job may be. But we are all to devote some energy by using our gifts for the mutual edification of the body of Christ. And we should never think it is not work.

Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater are said to be **"countrymen"** *syngeneis* to Paul. This likely means that they are Jews. Paul never appeared to dismiss his ties to those who were his **"countrymen according to the flesh"** (Romans 9:3) even though he viewed his own Hebrew resume' as **"rubbish"** *skybala* (Philippians 3:8). Paul is not being inconsistent here.

Truly that which binds us eternally together as brothers and sisters is Christ alone (Ephesians 2:15).

But there are other ties that bind. Whether it is a family relative, a fellow citizen, a co-worker, classmate or team-mate; we should not utterly dismiss the value of these types of relationships. They should rather be valued and spur us on care for and love these people. It should be our prayer that these mundane, temporary associations may transition into that which is eternal in Christ.

When my wife and I traveled through portions of Europe, we would encounter other Americans. We had that in common. We would engage in friendly discussion which often transitioned into deeper things. Often we would all connect on Facebook or Instagram where a whole new world of redemptive opportunity presents itself if one is willing to make the effort.

I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord (Romans 16:22).

Amanuenses

For reasons generally thought to be related to Paul's eyes or health, he wasn't normally the one who put the pen to the paper of his epistles, excepting the salutation at the end (1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17). One exception was Galatians (Galatians 6:11) where he appears to be seeking to be emphatic (perhaps due to the critical issues in those churches).

Whatever the reason might have been, Paul used what is known as an amanuensis (one who would write for another). Although the writing of Scripture by inspiration of the Holy Spirit should not be thought of as the Holy Spirit overtaking the hand of the writer in some mechanical sense (the writers of Scripture, though writing the word of God were at the same time, writing their own thoughts from their own hearts), Paul was likely giving Tertius word for word instruction on precisely what to write.

One wonders how that must have been for Tertius, to be used that way. He may have marveled or maybe even had questions regarding the very words he was writing. To be used by someone is generally presented in a very negative way. No one wants to be used. But to be used by God is an entirely different matter. Tertius was more than a secretary or scribe. Tertius, no doubt affected by what he wrote, extended his greetings as well.

I recall, when teaching a class to Chinese students through a translator, the translator (as she searched for the appropriate Chinese phrases to express my idea), would sometimes express such encouragement when the right words finally came to her. Other times she would ask me a question and we would have a dialogue prior to the translation. What a fearful yet glorious enterprise, to be handling the word of God.

I so enjoy the following quotation from Martin Lloyd Jones. He had taken ill for a time and was not able to preach. So his pulpit was filled by others while he worshiped in the congregation. When asked his opinion of the pulpit supply his response was:

I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him.

Tertius was no doubt sanctified by the very words he wrote.

Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother (Romans 16:23).

Gaius, Erastus, Quartus

Gaius is called Paul's "**host**" *xenos* and the host of the whole church. It is related to the word "**hospitality**" *philoxenon*. Gaius¹ likely provided some type of meeting place or accommodations for the entire church at Corinth. In order to do this, he must have been a man of significant wealth.

Erastus was a man that Paul had (possibly) sent with Timothy to Macedonia. So, he may have done some traveling in his ministerial efforts. But here he is identified as the "**treasurer of the city**" *oikonomos tes poleos*. Corinth was quite a bit city so Erastus was probably a person of high honor

¹ He was likely baptized by Paul (1 Corinthians 1:14).

and esteem. As Matthew Henry said of Erastus, **“Not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but some are.”**

We do see in the Scriptures, from time to time, people of means utilizing their wealth or post for the glory of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom. One thinks of Joseph of Arimathea,

...a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (Mark 15:43).

We see women who were said to have provided from their substance (Luke 8:3), Joseph, called Barnabas (Acts 4:36, 37), Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) and others using their wealth or status for good. For some, wealth was a stumbling block and for others it was a blessing. For some wealth takes over and they come to fear that they have much to lose (Matthew 19:16-30).

At another time while teaching in China, my assistant Loren and I were invited to participate in a worship service of the underground church. We were brought to what appeared to be an abandoned paint factory. But it was not abandoned. It was a very large and successful factory owned by a very sweet Christian man. As we were escorted down the streets of the factory we began to hear the faint sound of singing. Finally, a large sliding door was opened and we walked into a room of over 6000 Christians in unregistered and illegal worship of Christ.

Our translator shared with us that the Christian man who owned the factory had much to lose. At the conclusion of the service, hundreds of min-vans rapidly picked up the worshipers and within minutes the facility was empty. But if the authorities found out about this worship service, this man could lose his entire business and be thrown into a labor camp.

Gaius and Erastus were high visibility Christians and the spotlight would be upon them more than others. They did not allow their highly esteemed positions or wealth to be a stumbling block to their faithful service.

At the same time Quartus is someone we know absolutely nothing about, other than that he was a brother in Christ. And it may be for that very reason that the Spirit includes his name. Quartus can be a sort of fill-in-the-blanks Christian. In the same way the end of our prayer time, we often pray for all the unspoken needs, Quartus, like so many of us had his own strengths, weaknesses, gifts and impact. At this point, these are

known but to God. And that's what really matters. I was reading in a devotional this week about the burning bush. Was it a beautiful bush? A large bush?

No. As Major Ian Thomas has said, "Any old bush would have done. A scruffy, scraggly looking thing or a beautiful looking bush so shapely and fine. The bush is not important-- only that God was in the bush!"*

The burning bush is an Old Testament example of a New Testament truth: Christ in you, the hope of glory. God can set any life ablaze with Spirit-inspired power. A lowly outcast, or an honored aristocrat. An unskilled individual with lackluster gifts, or a talented person who is beautiful and bright. The "you" doesn't matter. What does matter is Christ in you.

"To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).²

Paul finishes with a brief benediction before his benediction with words we see quite often³:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Romans 16:24).

The Grace of God

This type of sentiment is repeated so often in Scripture one wonders if our Lord feared we might forget our need for grace or begin to think we need is less now than when first called.

We live in a world of innovative thinking, self-esteem, worldly wisdom, advanced technology and the ability to achieve what those only one hundred years ago would have thought, not only unattainable but unimaginable. In light of this I am always reminded of the words of my systematic theology seminary professor. He was a southern man with

² Joni Earickson Tada

³ The earliest and best witnesses omit verse 24.

profound intellect accompanied with a gentle humble heart. He was quite fond of pointing out that when it came to sin and redemption, modern man is simply ancient man dressed in a space suit. Every person who has ever lived, old or young, highly educated or uneducated, blue collar or white collar, red and yellow black and white needs the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as much as any other.

Questions for Study

1. How can small talk be helpful (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are ways you have/can encourage others (page 3)?
3. Why is it important to remember that ministry is work (page 4)?
4. Do our relationships with others who are not Christians have any value? What are some ties that bind you with others (pages 4, 5)?
5. Who was Tertius and what did he do? What should our disposition be when handling the word of God (pages 5, 6)?
6. In what ways can our possessions be used for good? What are some ways they can possess us (pages 6, 7)?
7. What is the only thing that truly matters when it comes to being of use in the hand of God (pages 7, 8)?
8. What does every person need as much as anyone else (page 8)?

