

Subject: A Time to Give Thanks

Scripture: Romans 16:1-16

Ecclesiastes 3:1 states: “To every thing there is a season, and time to every purpose under the heaven.” There is a time to give thanks. Paul understood that very well. As he came to the end of this letter to the church at Rome, he pauses to remember and give thanks for several people by name.

We are prone to remember Paul and forget all the ordinary people who helped him and made his ministry possible. On the other hand, Paul was careful to remember the people who touched his life and who made a valuable contribution to the cause of Christ.

The first 16 verses of Romans 16 could be called “Paul’s Thank-You List.” It may have been part of his prayer list. This list should help to jog our memory and inspire us to give thanks for the people God has put in our lives. Paul mentions 27 people by name. These names reveal the diversity within the church at that time. Some were names of people in influential families and others were names of common slaves. Some had Jewish names and others had Gentile names. Some were men and some were women, but they were all one in Christ. The phrase “in Christ” is found four times, “in the Lord” (4 times), and “beloved” (4 times). Let’s take a look at some of the reasons Paul gave thanks for these brothers and sisters.

1. Paul gave thanks for their SERVICE

Paul begins this chapter by commending a woman named Phebe, and he describes her as a “servant of the church.” It is remarkable that some of the people that Paul mentions are women. We know that women were also important in Christ’s ministry. Women followed to Him on the way to Calvary; they were at the foot of His cross; they were at His burial; and were present at the empty tomb.

This woman named Phebe was a servant of the church. She may have been the messenger who delivered Paul’s letter to Rome. Think of that awesome responsibility. She must have been a faithful and trustworthy servant. ***1 Corinthians 4:2** Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* When Christ evaluates his servants on judgment day, He will say to people like Phebe, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Nothing else is known about Phebe. John Phillips comments: “These names appear for a flash upon the pages of Scripture, and then are gone back in the black night of obscurity.” Most of these names are not well known. But they were known by Paul, and more important, they were known by the Lord. How thankful we are for people who serve the Lord.

2. Paul gave thanks for their SUPPORT

Paul gives credit where credit is due. He was grateful for Phebe, a servant of the church, and also (vs. 2), a “succourer” (helper) of many including Paul himself. He mentions Mary (vs. 6) who bestowed “much labor” on us, and others (vs. 12) who labored in the Lord. The word Paul used means hard work or toil. In verse 12, Tryphena and Tryphosa “labor” (present tense) in the Lord, but Persis “labored” (past tense), which may indicate that she was now disabled or unable to labor. Paul takes time to thank those who have helped and those who now help him in the work of the ministry. ***Hebrews 6:10** For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

3. Paul gave thanks for their SACRIFICE

In verses 3-4, Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila. They were tentmakers, like Paul. He was grateful for their help and their devotion to lay their lives down for him. We don't know exactly when and where this happened. They gave their time, energy, and their home (vs. 5) as a meeting place for believers. We may not give our lives, but we can all give something as a sacrifice.

A father gave his little girl two dollar bills. He told her she could do anything she wanted with one and the other dollar was for the offering at church on Sunday. She asked if she could go into the store and buy some candy with her dollar. On the way in she tripped and the wind blew one of the dollars into the storm drain. The little girl picked herself up, looked at the dollar bill still in her hand and said, "Well, Lord, there goes your dollar." We should always remember Paul's guidelines for giving (whether it is time, effort, or money):

***2 Corinthians 9:7-8**⁷ Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. Whatever we give, we should give it cheerfully and not grudgingly.*

4. Paul gave thanks for their SALVATION

Paul sent a special greeting (vs. 5) to Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Achaia (modern-day Turkey). Paul was always thankful for people were saved under his ministry. He knew it was the power of God and the grace of God. **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

5. Paul gave thanks for their SUFFERING

In verse 7, Paul mentions Andronicus and Junia, who were his "kinsman" (either related to Paul or his fellow Jews). They had spent time in prison together ("fellow prisoners"). Can you imagine the close bond between them? Many Christians in NT times suffered for their faith in Christ, and many are suffering today.

***Philippians 1:29** For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

***Hebrews 13:3** Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. We should remember that we are all in this together, through thick and thin.*

6. Paul gave thanks for their SPECIAL BOND

In verses 8-15, Paul repeats words like "beloved," "in Christ," and "in the Lord." Paul was thankful for the strong bond of Christian fellowship. He saw all relationships through the lens of being together in Christ. He understood all blessings coming to us in Christ.

In verse 10, he greets Apelles "approved in Christ." The word approved means tried and tested and found to be a real believer. In verse 13, he greets Rufus "chosen in the Lord." This

is the same word Paul used in chapter 8 (“called”) and elsewhere in the NT (“the elect”). It refers to believers as being called and chosen by God’s grace to be saved from sin, Satan, and the world. This man Rufus may be the same one mentioned in Mark 15:21, as the son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus’ cross to Calvary.

Paul concludes this section in verse 16, by encouraging them to greet fellow believers with a holy kiss, which was a personal and tangible way to show their love for one another. I’m sure when he finally came to Rome he greeted them all with a holy kiss.

APPLYING THIS MESSAGE TO YOUR LIFE:

- 1) Be thankful for your brothers and sisters in Christ

We can’t live the Christian life alone. We all need one another.

- 2) Express thanks to your brothers and sisters in Christ

There are many ways to express our thanks: a warm handshake or a hug, a kind word, a note of appreciation. We need to find a way to say thanks.