

Romans 16:5 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. (NKJV)

I intend to cover 11 verses this morning. I think that is a record in our study of Romans.

I also want to remind you that this sermon was prepared several weeks ago. So if anything I say sounds based on any recent conversations, it isn't. It is like God to address us through His word and His people with uncanny timing and preparation. Keep that in mind.

We will go through each name and learn what we can. We will stop at times for application. I am glad it was Brad and not me that had to move through all these names this morning. I will be reading them based on the Greek pronunciations this morning so bear with me.

5-Epaenetus (eh-pine'-eh-toss) His name means praiseworthy.

Our text says: **who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ**

Firstfruits of Asia. Ephesus was the leading city of Asia. Epaenetus was evidently the first Christian in that region. It isn't difficult to understand how important that would have been to Paul. He probably had very fond memories of this conversion. It would have shown to Paul that God was in this missionary trip. He was providing people that He had prepared ahead of time for Paul's message. So knowing this brother was in Rome, Paul could hardly go without greeting him.

6- Mary- Jewish name

who labored much for us. The word for labor means toiled to the point of exhaustion.

When you read this list of greetings it is impossible to miss the references to work. We find this same word used by the Apostle fishermen when they said that they labored all night fishing but if Christ wants them to throw the nets on the other side of the boat they will.

It is used to emphasize that the lilies, themselves, don't actually toil. They don't work hard.

In John, Christ told the disciples that He had sent them to reap where they had not labored but others had labored.

I really like how Paul describes his efforts in **Acts 20:34** **Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** "

In the book of Ephesians Paul wrote

Ephesians 4:28 **Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.** (NKJV)

In the greetings Paul gives in Chapter 16 there are 6 references to work or service. This is the point I want to make.

We are all reaping in proportion to what we are sowing. There is no magic in this. It is so simple. And yet it is easy to want to overlook this truth when we look at our lives. You know, when we look at our lives and wonder why we are not used more of God? When we look at our lives and wonder why our relationships are not the way they should be. When we look at our lives and wonder why our families are not what they should be. When we look in the mirror and see that we are not as we should be.

Do you know what it will take to change all those things, to improve those things, to make things better? It will take work. And the work described here isn't the easy paced casual work we might expect. No, that is not the word that is used. The word that is used is the "wear you out" kind of work.

Let's use marriage for an example here. Maybe you look at your marriage and you think, this is not like it is supposed to be. It is not how the Bible describes it.

Maybe that distresses you. Maybe you have become apathetic. Maybe you feel like it is hopeless. Let me ask you. Have you ever considered working, truly working, at being exactly what God says **you** are supposed to be in that relationship.

Instead of blaming the other person for being the disappointment or the source of your problems, focus your energy, serious time, in asking God what **work** he would have you perform in becoming the person He wants you to be?

Have you ever considered that most of the problems in marriage come from sloth?

We are not willing to do the work God wants us to do. And do you know what?

Most of the work is between your two ears. The work that is most needed in our marriages is work on ourselves. You cannot change the other person. But by God's grace and Spirit **you** can change.

Don't believe this is the problem? When is the last time you wrote down or memorized a verse of scripture specifically dealing with things in your marriage that **you** must do, or things in your marriage that **you** know you need to improve? When is the last time you spent time in your day prayerfully submitting to God intentionally in that area that is so difficult for **you**. As a husband maybe it is the need to sacrifice your own pleasure for those things you know your family and wife need from you.

God says this to us. Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. (NKJV)

1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (NKJV)

You know what husbands, God means it. This isn't rhetoric. It isn't for making a nice sign to hang on the wall. God means it. And he expects us to do it. But you might say, ah, but my wife is obstinate. She is hard to live with. She doesn't submit as she should. Well, let me ask you, how well do you submit to Christ? How is your record on submitting to Him and loving Him and serving Him? Well, how does He treat you? Is he cruel to you? Has He given up on you yet? No. And how are you to love your wife? Like He loves you. So do the work. Give up your excuses.

And wives- how about the areas where you **do what you feel like doing**, knowing that you are not following the directions of scripture.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. (NKJV)

1 Peter 3:3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel-- 4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (NKJV)

But you might say, ah but you don't know my husband. He is selfish and thoughtless. Maybe you can come up with a list of 50 issues with him. Well, you know what. God did not qualify his instructions. He did not say this is how you should treat a perfect husband. He said this is how you are to treat **YOUR** husband. And you know what? If you are not treating him this way, it is not **his** fault. It is **your** fault. How he **responds** is his fault. But how you treat him is yours.

God means all this stuff He says about marriage. It is work. And your marriages will be about as good as the work you invest in them.

God has got to be sick of our excuses. It would be better if we just came out and said, you know what God? I really don't think you know anything about marriage. So I am going to respond exactly how I want to, how I feel like. I will threaten what I want to threaten. I will rebel when I want to rebel. Because frankly, I know more about this topic than you do.

If we were to do this maybe it would dawn on us how brat-like we can be. Maybe it would dawn on us that our refusals, even small ones, to obey what God says are serious affronts to our worthy Savior.

I use marriage as one example, but there are hundreds. Bible study is another example. Do you really know what scripture says about how you should live your life? How much work do you really do at seeing to it that **you do what you do** the way God says? If you don't do the work, it won't happen.

How about as a church? Do we do the work it takes to truly minister to one another? Yeah, we have good positive regard for each other. But who shows up out of nowhere to do the work we need in each other's lives.

I'm not a big fan of Ringo Starr but he got one thing right. He said "You know it don't come easy."

We Christians are big fans of Grace. And, oh, how we should be. No work will ever give us what Grace has provided us for free. At the same time, Paul wasn't honoring these people because they happened to exist. The ones who were closest to Paul were closest because of the fellowship of work. Work is the outcropping of love. In fact it is what we were created for.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (NKJV)

We were born again for work. So is it surprising that we have work to do?

I know I expanded on this application once before, but I think it is that important. And since I need to hear this as much as anyone, I feel sincere in saying it to **you**. In the traditional list of the seven deadly sins, sloth comes first. There is a reason for that. Inaction is probably the greatest danger we face inside our heads, in our families, and in our church. We have all the resources to storm hell's gates, but we don't feel like it. We are busy about other stuff. We say we believe God's word, but we really don't trust it. Elders, fathers, husbands, wives, mothers, kids, grandmothers, grandfathers, young men, young women, we have instructions that we are clearly given. They aren't even hard to understand most of the time. But aren't we guilty of giving into our strong desires and doing whatever we most strongly feel like doing. You know what God wants from us at Ferndale this morning. He wants us to focus our energy on doing what He says because we love Him and trust Him and we believe He knows what He is doing. We are never a victim when we believe and trust and obey God, no matter how it looks or feels temporarily.

Husband, love your wives like your own flesh. Wives submit to and show respect to your husbands. Children obey your parents. Older women, teach younger women how to truly be good and submissive wives. Young men, keep your lives pure. Everyone, reach out to meet the needs around you.

Yep- we are talking about work. And yep, it will be inconvenient and uncomfortable. But you know what? We don't really have all that much time here anyway. And in eternity work will take on a whole different meaning, a whole different demeanor. So ultimately, we have a whole lot to gain by working now. And we have a whole lot to lose by refusing to labor.

OK, let's move on

7- Andronicus (an-drawn'-eh-koss) Latin Name &

7- Junia (ee-oo-knee'-oss) Greek name

my countrymen and my fellow prisoners

who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

My countrymen could also mean blood relatives. That is what it usually means. But it could go either way. So Andronicus and Junia could have been Paul's relatives or just fellow Jews.

But notice that these two believed before Paul did. It is likely that they were in Jerusalem when they came to Christ. That would have been the norm for Jewish people. Many would flock to Jerusalem once a year or as often as they could get there for the Passover. So it would make sense they came to Christ there. Then somehow they made it back to Rome. It may be that this is how they came to be known by the Apostles. They were evidently two people who were exemplary in some way. They were the kind of people who you would notice. Maybe it was by

the volume or quality of work that they did. We don't know. But they were no slouches.

8- Amplias (ahm-plea'-oss) Latin Name

Paul says this person was beloved in the Lord. He was close to Paul. Important to Paul. That is not all that unusual.

9- Urbanus (oar-ba-noss') Latin Name

our fellow worker in Christ

Here again we see reference to work. Paul feels affinity with Urbanus due to the work that he does.

9- Stachys (stah'-kooose)

my beloved

Again a person Paul cares about.

10- Apelles (ah-pell-ace')

approved in Christ means tried and tested. It is easy to create a good impression, use Christian lingo, do the right things in public, and wear the latest Christian t-shirt. But that proves nothing. Tried and tested means that the insincere reasons for following Christ get removed. And what is left is your true motivation. If you love Christ, you will obey Him. You will follow Him. You will trust Him. If you do not love Christ you will not. And God uses life to try us and test us, to either prove that the supernatural work He did in us is powerful for salvation, or to prove we have not been reborn.

10- Household of Aristobulus (are-res-tab'-ooh-loss)

Aristobulus is probably the grandson of Herod the great. Either Aristobulus is not a believer or he died before Paul wrote the letter, since he is not addressed. These must have been slaves and employees. This is interesting. God had his people in Ceasers household. We see that in Philippians I believe. The household of Aristobulus may have gone to the Ceaser at Aristobulus's death. So this may have been them that Paul referred to.

The point to me is that God gets his people where He wants them. We might come up with all kinds of strategies, and often we should, but God always has His people where he wants them. I remember hearing a speaker at a music festival tell of a person from his church who was witnessing to Madonna at the time. God has us scattered out all over the place because He wants his light to shine where he puts us. We need to take that seriously and take advantage of every opportunity.

11- Herodian (hay-road-dee'-own)

My countryman. This may also be a relative Paul or, at least, a fellow jew.

11- Household of Narcissus (nark'-ih-soss)

Who are in the Lord

Mr. Lightfoot, a scholar who focused on historical accuracy said the following: Here, as in the case of Aristobulus, the expression seems to point to some famous person of the name. And the powerful freedman Narcissus, whose wealth was proverbial... whose influence with Claudius was unbounded, and who bore a chief part in the intrigues of this reign, alone satisfies this condition.... As was usual in such cases, his household would most probably pass into the hands of the emperor, still however retaining the name of Narcissus. (ibid., p. 175)

So here again we see Christians with great access to the actual leaders of the Roman Kingdom.

12- Tryphena (true'-fy-nah) and Tryphosa (true-fo'-sah) probably sisters. Their names suggest they were from a family of means since their names mean dainty and delicate.

Who have labored in the Lord.

Isn't it interesting that a pair of sisters, possibly twins, born into the lap of luxury, are known for this? Their labor. Again, when we are together in the Lord we own together His mission. And it becomes the work of all of us. There is no slave or freeman in the Lord. There are no big shots and little shots. We are all to be about the work of the Master.

12- Persis (pear-cease')

Labored much in the Lord

Nothing more needs said here.

13- Rufus (roo'-foss) Latin

Chosen in the Lord. This probably does not refer to Rufus's salvation. This would have to be said for every believer. It probably means something more like "choice" or "select". It is like the fruit that is a little better than the other fruit. Or a cut of meat that is better quality than the others. Evidently Rufus has done something that has singled out his ministry in a noticeable good way. It is likely that we know a little more about Rufus from the writings of Mark.

Mark 15:21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. (NKJV) Mark's gospel was probably written from Rome so it makes a lot of sense that he would have included Rufus in his gospel since he was writing it from Rufus's current home town.

13- Rufus mother

His mother and mine- This is cool. Christ told his followers

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. (NKJV)

The hundredfold we receive is **in this life**. Then, later, we inherit eternal life.

Here Paul shows **his experience** of this fact. We don't know a lot about Paul's family but we gather he was rejected by them for his profession of Christ. And what does God give him? He brings along Rufus's mother to be like a mother to him. And this is probably not the only example of this in Paul's life. Paul paid a great cost to follow Christ. He was probably left with some serious needs. But God was faithful to provide for his needs with His family members.

14- Asyncritus (ah-soon'-cree-toss)

14- Phlegon (fleg'-on)

14- Hermas (hair-moss')

14- Patrobas (pat-robe'-oss)

14- Hermes (hair-mace')

14- And the Brethren with them

15- Philologus (fill-all'-low-goss)

15- Julia (ee-oh-lee'-ah)

15- Nereus (nair-use')

William Barclay writes:

In a.d. 95 there happened an event which shocked Rome. Two of the most distinguished people in Rome were condemned for being Christians. They were husband and wife. The husband was Flavius Clemens. He had been consul of Rome. The wife was Domatilla and she was of royal blood. She was the granddaughter of Vespasian, a former Emperor, and the niece of Domitian, the reigning Emperor. In fact the two sons of Flavius Clemens and Domatilla had been designated Domitian's successors in the imperial power. Flavius was executed and Domatilla was banished to the island of Pontia where years afterwards Paula saw the cave where "she [Domatilla] drew out a long martyrdom for the Christian name." And now the point—the name of the chamberlain of Flavius and Domatilla was Nereus. Is it possible that Nereus the slave had something to do with the making into Christians of Flavius Clemens the ex-consul and Domatilla the princess of the royal blood? Again maybe it is an idle speculation, for Nereus is a common name, but again, maybe it is true. (*Letters to the Romans* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], p. 237)

15- Nereus's sister

15- Olympas (oh-loom-poss')

15- And all the saints with them

It is likely that all these people from this last list were slaves. They had very common slave names. And probably some from very prominent households. The slaves in that culture were often very well educated and they had very significant responsibilities. They often had a channel available to them to gain their freedom. Now think about the implications of all this. The Roman church was destined to be one of the strongest churches in Christendom. Look at the roots. Think about the logistics and the situations these people were faced with. God raised up a church using the least likely people right in the middle of the lion's jaws. Doesn't that encourage you? Our God has no limitations. He can and will do what He wants, Where He wants, with Who He wants. He knows no limitations. We sometimes think that a situation is impossible. But it isn't. A person in the most unlikely spot may find a Bible and come to Christ with no outside influence at all. Or God might use an electrician or a plumber to take the Gospel right where it needs to go. We just never know. God has a plan. And at the end of the day, it will happen. And we have the glorious opportunity to apply ourselves to the work of that kingdom. And we know for sure it will be richly rewarded.

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

Three other places where Paul gives this same instruction. I Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, I Thess 5:26

It is likely that Paul wanted to seal the fellowship of these Saints when the letter has been read to them.

This holy kiss was a token of love toward fellow believers. It was an endorsement of the unity they had in Christ. It was to be an outward display of an inward reality. It was also something that was known and practiced culturally. Today Paul might say "greet each other with a Holy handshake." And it would convey the same warmth and closeness.

Well, we covered a lot of ground this morning. I hope we are all encouraged to consider what work needs done in our areas of responsibility and influence. I trust that God's word has provided guidance into the homework we have for this week. And remember- **10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**