

*“I can’t preach this passage! ... What would anyone learn? ... How would anyone be better equipped by it to serve the Lord? ... Who could possibly stay awake?...” ... I know (full-well) what 2 Timothy 3:16 says: **ALL** Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness... but common’ (!) this is just a list of names. ... Paul is saying goodbye as he closes his letter to the church at Rome... and he mentions so many people – most of whom we know **nothing** at all! ... We have had such a good time in Romans... why end our time here with such a ‘fizzle’...?”*

I must be honest! These had been my thoughts... all the way up to Monday morning when I came to the office to prepare for today’s passage. I had more than half-a-mind to just end with last week’s passage and start a new book of the Bible. ... But I quickly discovered... that if I did... I would be robbing myself... (and perhaps you too) of some great spiritual treasure and insights.

Men such as Warren Wiersbe called me to immediate repentance. Here is what he wrote... as his opening comments about Romans chapter 16.

*What a remarkable chapter! In it Paul greeted at least twenty-six people by name, as well as two unnamed saints; and he also greeted several churches that were meeting in homes. He closed with greetings from nine believers who were with him in Corinth when he wrote the letter. What is the significance of this? It shows that Paul was a friend maker as well as a soul winner. He did not try to live an isolated life; he had friends in the Lord, and he appreciated them. They were a help to him personally and to his ministry. In my own reading of Christian biography, I have discovered that the servants whom God has used the most were people who could make friends.*

One fascinating thing about Romans 16 is what it reveals about Paul. ... He possessed one of the greatest intellects of all time (right up there with Plato and Aristotle.) ... But unlike those two outstanding Greeks... Paul was not merely a thinker and teacher.

(You know)... Some have the idea that people who have such a high intellect (even those who study Christian theology) —are not interested in people. ... We see them as *immersing* themselves in books. ... and not very "relational." ... Often times people with this kind of intellectual ability and drive are hard to get close to... but this was not Paul. We are about to see that Paul was so intensely personal... that it would be easy for us to conclude that Paul showed more interest in people... than anyone else in the Bible - except Jesus.

Paul sends his greetings to more than twenty-four people in Rome. ... When we remember *that Paul had never been in Rome*... and there was no postal service for civilians... no cell phones... text messaging... or social media... that could have given him quick information about what was going on... or *who* was doing *what*... ... it is remarkable that he knew so many people who were there (in Rome) and that he knew so much about them. ... If you have never been to *Denver*... I doubt that you would be able to name 24 people who lived there.

How did he get to know them? And how did he know so many details about their lives? ... Most... no doubt... were people he had gotten to know in the long course of his missionary work... *and then* had kept track of... following them *in his mind* as they left Ephesus... Corinth... or wherever... and relocated to Rome.

Either he had led these people to Christ... or they had worked with him... or he had been imprisoned with them for Christ's sake. ... (And) Paul loved them all. ... So he kept track of them with his sharp mind... following what happened to them in their work and travels.

Think of the energy such "keeping in touch" involved! Imagine Paul on ship and in port beseeching travelers for information: "*What about Patrobas? Where is Hermes now? Is he still walking in faith? What can I pray for?*" We know from the testimony of other Scriptures that this is the way Paul was. He routed his journeys and scheduled his disciples' travels so as to obtain as much information as possible. ... Paul... (one of the greatest of intellects)... was this kind of a caring man who loved people.

Why do we need to see this...? What's in it for us to know that Paul was this way...? ... Because a church is supposed to be like a family... in which the older people train and encourage the younger... where everyone is accountable and finds security... acceptance... hope... and help.

The church must be a warm... welcoming body... not a well-oiled... slick machine. ... I have attended churches where people are processed – not loved! ... Maybe you have too.

In college I attended (for a while) a popular church that reminded me of a mechanical Disneyland attraction (like the Bear Jamboree.) We parked our cars blocks away... stood in equally spaced rows of long lines... and when the side doors opened on the east side of the building... the people in the previous service all rushed out... while we rushed-in through the automated doors that simultaneously opened on the west side.

We entered a dark auditorium... sat down... the doors closed... a spotlight hit the harpist on stage... she played... then professionals sang... the preacher regaled us with his engaging stories and wit... and then (suddenly) sunlight spilled into the auditorium once again as the doors on both sides opened on cue. Dutifully we got up and filed out as the next crowd entered (as though they were being sucked-in by a vacuum)... and we went back to our cars ... .. I felt **processed**.

Of course we should try to do ministry as effective and efficient as possible. But I would much rather have our focus to be a warm... welcoming... loving body.

We need Paul's warmhearted loving example to **challenge** us. ... Church... we are **not** (right now) like what so many gospel-preaching churches have become... as they **process people**... instead of focusing **more** on welcoming and loving them. ... But let's pray that we never do!

When Patti and I are on vacation... we will visit another church. (You know)... sometimes as visitors... we cannot **pry** a grin from the regular attenders. ... .. It is **imperative** that we keep *agape* love as the burden of our hearts. We must reach out in love to those around us. ... [ P A U S E ]

(Now)... just before we get to our passage... let me give you a reason **why** it is so important that we never lose our emphasis on being warm and welcoming. (We will see something of this in today's passage – so watch for it!) Now here is **why**: even though Paul was the great giver... it all came back to him! ... Paul **received MORE** than he gave!

It is thought that Paul had an eye problem... and in Galatians 4:15 Paul testifies that there were some in the Church who loved him so much they would have plucked out their eyes for him.

And we will see in verse 13 of our text today... that Paul greets Rufus and he also greets Rufus' mother. He says of Rufus' mother that she "*has been a mother to me, too.*" ... .. Paul received back more than he gave. It is as Jesus said:

**Mark 10:29-30 (ESV)**

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*

The "hundred times" principle was alive in Paul's life. He had a hundred mothers... a hundred farms... a thousand brothers and sisters and children. He was the richest man in the whole Roman empire!

**Why** do we need Paul's warmhearted loving example to *challenge* us...? Because Christ's words... and Paul's example... are true! ... The richest people in town... are always those who love the most. "People persons"... (those who remember names and pray for them)... receive the most.  
... [ P A U S E ] ...

So... please open your Bibles with me now to Romans chapter 16.

**Romans 16:1-2**

He began with Phebe (a member of the church at Cenchrea)... which was the *sea-port* of Corinth. ... .. What seems most likely (because she is

mentioned first... and because of the way she is commended to the church)... is that Phoebe carried this letter from Paul (who was in Corinth)... to the church at Rome.

It was not very safe for a woman to travel alone in the ancient world... so Phoebe probably had people with her. But it is Phoebe who is mentioned and not these other persons—not even a husband.

She is described as a servant. The word "servant" is the feminine of *deacon*... and some scholars believe she was a "*deaconess*" in the church. This is possible... because there were women in the early church who served by visiting the sick... assisting the young women... and helping the poor.

In verse two Paul says that she has been a patron of many ("myself included" he adds.) The word "patron" ( προστάτις pros-ta-tis) means "one who aided or defended others in their cause... and especially one who undertook to manage the cause of *strangers* and foreigners before the courts. ... Applied to Phebe... it means probably that she had shown great kindness in various ways to the apostle... and to other Christians - probably by receiving them into her house and by administering to the sick.

### **Romans 16:3-4**

Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned six different places in the New Testament. We learn from these scattered references that Aquila was a Jew from Pontus who had settled in Rome but had been forced to leave Rome... together with his wife (Priscilla)... when the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from the capital (Acts 18:2). ... Aquila was a tentmaker... which was Paul's occupation too. This is what brought them together when

Paul had to work in Corinth to support himself during this period of his missionary outreach. When Paul left Corinth for Ephesus... this couple went with him but then stayed on in Ephesus.

These coworkers were well-known for their teaching and ministry. When Apollos (an eloquent teacher of the Scriptures) came to Ephesus... it became clear that he needed more instruction in the faith. They "took him home with them and explained God's way to him more accurately" (Acts 18:24-26).

Aquila and Priscilla had a firm understanding of Scripture... great ability... and outstanding courage. Paul calls them his fellow workers... adding that they risked their lives for him and that "*all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*" ... We do not know how they risked their lives for Paul... but it may have been at Ephesus when the mob led by the makers of idols of the goddess Diana were rioting.

By the time Paul wrote this letter they had returned to Rome. ... Priscilla and Aquila had a group of believers meeting in their house.

### **Romans 16:5**

Epenetus (whom Paul mentions next) was Paul's friend. He calls him "*my dear friend*"... adding that he was "*the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*" ... Please try to imagine the amount of courage it would take to be the very first person on the continent to surrender your life and all you had (completely) to the Lord. (He didn't have his mom and grandmother praying and encouraging him to do so – like I did.) Just imagine the reactions of his neighbors... friends and fellow-workers (the questioning...

misunderstanding... ridicule... and mockery.) ... Epenetus was unquestionably a man of remarkable courage. No wonder Paul remembered and kept track of him.

### **Romans 16:6**

Paul says that Mary "*worked very hard for you,*" which means that she was from Rome. Paul had probably been told about her by Aquila and Priscilla... who had come to Corinth about the time Paul had first arrived there. ... Literally Paul's words mean "*Mary the toiler.*" Mary had the gift of helps... and Paul is careful to remember those who exercise such service.

### **Romans 16:7**

Paul says four things about these two people: **(1)** they were kinsmen - which may mean blood relatives of Paul... but *probably* only means that they *too* were Jewish... possibly of the tribe of Benjamin like Paul. **(2)** they had been in prison with him, **(3)** they were well-known to the apostles. These two were well-known and respected by Jesus' apostles... And **(4)** they were believers in Christ before Paul was converted.

(Now) the next twenty names in verse 8-12 offer very little information. All we know for certain is that each name brought to mind a relationship the apostle cherished and shared in common with the church in Rome. But there is something strangely attractive about these shadowy names which appear for a flash upon the page of Scripture... and then are gone back into the black night of obscurity. ... They flare up before our gaze like bursts of flame and then burn down to a little handful of white ashes.

It is interesting how the Spirit of God passes over in silence so much that we would like to know. What made all these people so great in the early church? ... We will never know... until that great day when all the saints are gathered around the throne of God and are there publicly honored for their deeds of distinction. Then all the unsung multitude of God's worthies, will come into their own. One day we will know.

But there are some things that we can deduce from these names. For example... Ampliatius was a common slave name (so he probably was.) Also... Apelles is the Greek name that a Jewish slave would take when enslaved. There is little doubt that this member of the Roman church was also a slave. These two are mentioned in this section of verses.

### **Romans 16:8-12**

*The households of Aristobulus and Narcissus* are touched on. ... Neither Aristobulus nor Narcissus is greeted personally by Paul. Paul speaks only of their households. ... Most scholars believe that Paul is greeting the household slaves of two prominent families in Rome.

"Tryphena and Tryphosa" were probably twins who were given names that go together. These female names mean "*dainty*" and "*delicate*." Paul employs some playful irony here because he calls them "*women who work hard in the Lord*," using a word that means to labor to the point of exhaustion. Dainty and delicate, yes—but "*dynamite comes in small packages*."

### **Romans 16:13**

Who was this Rufus? ... If you look up his name in a concordance... you will find that a Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15:21. ... That chapter tells the story of Christ's crucifixion... and it mentions that a Cyrenian man named Simon was forced to carry Christ's cross when Jesus was too weak to do it.

Mark adds that Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Why would the Gospel writer (Mark) mention that? ... He would (only) if Alexander and Rufus were known - to his original readers. ... Well... guess what (?) ... Mark's Gospel was written for the church at Rome! So now it makes sense why Mark said Simon (Jesus' cross carrier) was Rufus' dad... He probably was the son of the man who carried Christ's cross.

What a story lies hidden here! Simon was a Jew who... like all Jews... would have hated the Romans. To be pressed into service by a Roman soldier and be forced to carry the cross of a condemned man must have been a bitter experience for him.

But something important must have happened to Simon that day. Instead of merely flinging down the cross at Golgotha... Simon must have been struck by the person of Jesus... stayed to watch the crucifixion... and eventually been converted. ... After the Passover he would have returned home to Cyrene and would have told his family about Jesus. They may have become Christians through his testimony.

Or perhaps Simon had his family with him at the time. Our imaginations can easily picture the family of Simon along side the road watching their husband and father carry the cross for Jesus up the hill of Calvary. The

impact of the crucifixion would forever change their lives by leading to their conversion.

### **Romans 16:14-16**

Nothing is known about these men... although *Hermas* was another common slave name.

In the East... a kiss was and is a sign of respect and affection. "A hearty handshake" would give the idea in our culture. ... A warm handclasp conveys the idea of love... respect... fellowship and warmth. ... It is just this that Paul had in mind. ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

Now verses 17-20 take a sudden... unexpected... and different turn. ... As he continues to express his heart-felt love... Paul cannot help but issue a warning to them about an imminent danger. In fact... (two years later)... once Paul did arrive in Rome... he found that the matter he warned them about... was *indeed* the case.

These verses contain so much for us... that I am not going to quickly brush through them. Today... I will jump over them... and next week we will pour into them. ... So let's finish with Paul's list of friends.

In verses 21-24... Paul mentions those who were with him in Corinth... as he wrote this letter to Rome.

### **Romans 16:21-24**

We all know who Timothy was. Timothy was Paul's young protege, whom he had picked up in Lystra on his second missionary journey. He had a Greek father but a Jewish mother (which made him a Jew) and Paul used

him to build up the Gentile churches he had himself founded earlier. Paul thought highly of Timothy... writing this of him to the Philippians: "*I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare*" (Phil. 2:20)

Lucius... Jason... and Sosipater are unknown... other than they were fellow Jews. ... But there is something that I discovered this week that throws a bright spotlight on these other names... and (boy!) do we stand to gain some rich spiritual lessons... from it.

The key to unlock our treasure is the nature of a few names that are listed... and the place to begin is with the names "Tertius" and "Quartus." (Hang-with me. I promise a big pay-off!)

In his commentary on Romans... Donald Grey Barnhouse explains that the first time he was in the Orient he was entertained in a beautiful home that had a large retinue of servants. One of these servants spoke English and had everything under his control. The man who was Barnhouse's host said, "*He is the best number-one boy in China.*"

"*Number-one boy?*" queried Barnhouse. "*What are the qualifications of a number-one boy?*"

His host explained:

*"The number-one boy is a Chinese institution. He runs absolutely everything in connection with the household. He hires the other servants. He supervises the marketing. You would never find him carrying a package; a third boy or a fourth boy would be doing that. The number-one boy is the equivalent of an English gentleman's gentleman, plus a nurse, a housekeeper, and many other things. The ambition of third boy is to become second boy, and the ambition of second boy is to become number-one boy."*

The same system prevailed in the Roman Empire... and the names of two of these servants... number-three boy and number-four boy... are recorded here.

In a prominent Roman household (as this was) the servants would have the names “Primus” (one)... “Secundus” (two)... “Tertius” (three)... “Quartus” (four)... “Quintus” (five)... and so on. These are just Roman numbers... which designate their hierarchy as a slave – through their name. So in Romans 16 we have a case of the number-three slave and the number-four slave - adding their names - alongside of those of prominent citizens like Gaius and Erastus!

Because Paul had an eye disease from his first missionary journey (Galatians 4:13-15)... he found it necessary to dictate his letters to a secretary. ... On this occasion it was the number three slave boy in Gaius’ house... where Paul was staying. ... And he sent his own greetings to people he would have had no way of meeting... but he felt attached to them because of their common identity as believers in Jesus.

So we have two slaves being treated as equals in their greeting with their master (Gaius.) ... And we also have a very important man of Corinth (the city treasurer) who is also treated as their equal. Our picture of the early church is shown here as “rich and poor”... “free men and slaves” ... wealthy homeowners.... and important city officials. - What diversity!

They simply ignored the differences that were dividing the rough Roman world and came together as followers of Jesus Christ. ... It was an actual oneness... absolutely above and beyond all human distinctions. ... (And get a load of “number four boy!) Quartus knew nobody in Rome and

nobody in Rome had ever heard of Quartus... but he loved them and wanted them to know it... so even he chimes-in. WOW!!! ... [ P A U S E ]

OK... now some final thoughts as we wrap up...

Though Paul had a supreme intellect... as few have had in the history of the world... he would not have been used like he was - if he had not had a heart which loves people... a heart which remembers names... and people's life situations... a protective heart.

How did Paul come to know and actually love so many Christians? How did he remember them all? ... .. Chiefly because he was thinking about them rather than about himself. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Chuck Swindoll wrote:

*Paul and his companions in Rome didn't share a lukewarm love. The hardships and victories of ministry had bound their hearts together in a deep... abiding affection that neither time nor distance could diminish. ... He hoped this same kind of affection would bind the believers in Rome into a tight-knit community. ... As a matter of fact... he (no doubt) would want the same for us today.*

*If this is the kind of church you want to call home... take the lead - be the first. Become an example of authentic affection... and praise those who join you. Ignore the frowning critics... and genuinely smile down every sourpuss. Then see what effect it has on the entire church.*