

On the Altar: Paul's Friends

(Romans 16:1-16)

I. Introduction

- A. What would you say is our (unofficial) official *Church of Christ Bible Verse*?
1. I would probably say that verse is **Acts 2:38**, “*Repent and be baptized...*”
 - a. We’ve studied, quoted and pointed to that verse in discussions of baptism
 - b. **True Story:** A youth group passed another van with “Church of Christ”
 - 1) They tried to flag it down, but couldn’t; they had rented van— *no sign*
 - 2) They wrote “Acts 2:38” and held it up to window—van pulled over!
 - c. I remember hearing of one boy who told his mother that the preacher said all he needed to convince people to be baptized was an axe and two 38’s
 2. But if **Acts 2:38** is not our official verse, then it has to be **Romans 16:16**.
 - a. That’s where we get our name, “*The churches of Christ salute you*” (KJV)
 - b. It’s not only Bible name for the church, but it became the name we used
 - 1) Had “*Churches of Christ Salute You (Rom 16:16)*” bumper-sticker!
 - 2) So **Romans 16:16** would be our official verse except for one thing
 - c. And that is part of the verse— “*Greet one another with the holy kiss.*”
 - 1) We used to have a guy was very Biblical—he holy kisses each week!
 - 2) Fortunately, he was Biblical only with the ladies! (*I appreciated that*)
 3. Our text today is **Rom 16:16**, both “*greet each other*” and “*salute you*” part
- B. We’ve come to the end of lesson series “*On the Altar*” from **Romans 12-16**
1. Paul stresses the message of salvation by grace in the first part of Romans.
 - a. But the practical application of grace isn’t just knowing the theology.
 - 1) Church sometimes describe itself as a “*Grace-Centered Church.*”
 - 2) Great! But that has to be more than understanding grace theology
 - b. Paul’s practical application of grace is that we must **live graciously**.
 - c. Section begins by telling us to give ourselves as living sacrifices (**12:1**)
 - d. **On the Altar:** We love each other, bear w/ each other, build up each other
 2. Paul ends Romans with a very personal postscript—greeting to people.
 3. This may appear to be a random list of names, but there is a lesson here.

II. My Fellow Workers (Reading: [Romans 16:1-16](#))

- A. Keep in mind that Paul wrote the letter to Rome without ever being there.
1. We don't know exactly how the church in Rome was planted.
 - a. There were “*strangers from Rome*” present Pentecost in [Acts 2:10](#)
 - b. We assume they returned to Rome after Pentecost to establish a church.
 - c. What we do know is that when Paul writes Romans, he never been there
 - 1) He expresses a deep desire to one day visit Rome ([Rom 1:13-15](#))
 - 2) His plans are to swing by Rome on his way to Spain ([Rom 15:28](#))
 - d. Paul would eventually visit Rome... and Caesar would pick up the tab
 2. What is surprising is that Romans is the most personal letter Paul writes
 - a. Paul spend 3+ years at Ephesus, but Ephesians has no personal greetings
 - b. Paul greets 28 people in [Rom 16](#); not bad for a place he's never been!
 - c. There's old saying, “All roads lead to Rome.” Rome was center of empire
 - 1) Roman society was mobile; people tended to go to the capital city
 - 2) There were a lot of people at Rome that Paul knew from other places
- B. So it sounds like a family reunion as Paul gets greets all these people.
1. Some of the folks he greets have familiar names—**Aquila** and **Priscilla**
 - a. This husband and wife team had met Paul at Corinth ([Acts 18:1](#)).
 - b. They were from Rome, and were expelled with Jews by edict of Claudius
 - c. They had worked alongside Paul, and he says they risked their lives.
 2. There is another familiar name, or maybe a familiar name—**Rufus** ([v. 13](#))
 - a. Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene ([Mk 15:21](#)). *May be same guy*
 - b. Paul calls him “chosen in the Lord.” *His father helped carry cross?*
 - c. **Point:** Paul considered Rufus' mother as his own mother. *Relational*
 3. Paul also greets many at Rome that we don't know anything about—
 - a. He calls **Andronicus** and **Junias** “*relatives*” (*also calls them “apostles”*)
 - b. He calls **Hermes** and **Hermas** as “*brothers.*” Simple but *relational* term
 - c. **Phoebe** is called a “*sister*” and “*deaconess*” (word used here is διάκονος)
 - 1) She is a “*servant of the church*” which sounds an official position.
 - 2) But the title that Paul stresses here is more relational (“*sister*”)

- d. A woman Paul calls a “*dear friend in the Lord*” is **Persis**. *Relational*
 - e. Many of the people Paul greets are singled out because of shared work
 - 1) **Urbanus** is called Paul’s “*fellow worker in Christ*” (**v. 9**)
 - 2) **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa** are “*women who work hard in the Lord.*”
 - f. Others are just names, but there is a story behind each name (**16:14-15**)
- C. Some would see **Romans 16** like a note on the bottom of a Hallmark card
1. We buy cards with inspirational messages by Helen Steiner Rice or someone
 - a. The message may be perfect, but you can’t just sign it—too impersonal
 - b. So you write a personal greeting or note at the bottom of the card.
 2. So some see **Romans 16** like message tacked on at the bottom of the card
 - a. The **real message** in Romans is that of salvation by faith thru grace.
 - b. **Rom 16** is just a personal note Paul added at the end. *Not that important*
 3. But in reality, these personal greetings at the end **become** Paul’s message.
 - a. The message of Romans is **grace**, the application is to live **graciously**—
 - b. “*On the Altar*” as living sacrifices means **living grace** toward each other
 - 1) We “*form one body, and each member belongs to all others*” (**12:5**)
 - 2) We are to “*be devoted to one another in brotherly love*” (**12:10**)
 - 3) We “*share with God’s people*” and “*practice hospitality*” (**12:13**)
 - 4) We must “*be willing associate with people of low position*” (**12:16**)
 - 5) Paul reminds us of our “*continuing debt to love one another*” (**13:8**)
 - 6) Grace means we “*stop passing judgment on one another*” (**14:13**)
 - 7) It means “*accept one another just as Christ accepted you*” (**15:7**)
 4. Paul ends his book mentioning by name people who are precious to him.
 - a. As he does so, he shows them what “*loving one another*” looks like
 - b. These greetings of love and family reinforce the message of grace
 - c. **Note:** Some of these names are Hebrew, some Greek, and some Latin.
 - 1) Part of the problem in the church is dealing with these differences
 - 2) Such differences made a huge difference in world/culture of Rome
 - 3) But they make no difference in Christ... and no difference in church!
 - d. In this final greeting, Paul shows them (and us) what church looks like.

III. Conclusion

- A. These names may sound strange to us, but there were stories behind each one.
1. All of these names represent lives that intersected and affected Paul's life
 - a. They were more than just the first readers of book of Romans
 - b. They were Paul's family—his brothers, sisters and even mother
 - c. Our challenge as a church is to become this kind of spiritual family today
 2. I know you can't tell by looking, but I am a blogger (A blog is a "web log")
 - a. Some blogs are diaries, but I'm boring; mine is more like bulletin article
 - b. This week, I wrote about [John 13:34-35](#), our Tues daily Bible reading
For some reason, the immediate context of this new command never hit me before... at least, I don't remember it hitting me. Jesus gives the apostles this new command right AFTER he predicts the betrayal of Judas and right BEFORE he predicts the denial of Peter. So this "new command" stressing the absolute importance of disciples loving one another is given between the bookends of the two greatest failures of Jesus' closest friends to love Him. It is almost as if Jesus wants to make sure that we don't betray each other the way that His closest friends betrayed Him!
 - c. Blogs allow comments, and one of my (1/2 dozen) readers added this—
"Are we finally beginning to realize that love is a "doctrinal matter?"
 3. There've been times in past when we've treated love as an optional extra
 - a. What matters is being right, getting doctrine down & jotting all the tittles
 - 1) If relationships are lost or unity destroyed— *price of doing business*
 - 2) That's not what Paul calls us to here; that's not living on the altar
 - b. Love really is a doctrinal matter; Jesus really did die to make us ONE.
 - c. The closer we come to the cross, the closer we will come to each other
- B. Dr. John Fawcett was preaching at a small church in Wainsgate, England
1. In 1772, he was called to pastor a much larger church in London.
 - a. So he preached his farewell sermon and prepared to move on
 - b. The wagons were loaded and he and his wife were ready to leave
 2. Church gathered a last time to send them off... probably one last pot luck!
 - a. His wife said, "*Oh John, I cannot bear this.*" He said, "*Neither can I.*"
 - b. The wagons were unloaded, and Fawcett preached there another 50 yrs
 - c. He was inspired to sit down and write a hymn, *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*
 3. The tie that binds us to God binds us to one another. *We must live that out!*