

Paul's Family at Rome

(Romans 16)

I. Introduction

- A. I love this time of the year, but I have to keep this enthusiasm rather muted
 - 1. Lynn went back to work this week (don't like that, but I like the paycheck)
 - a. I do like that vacations are over and our schedules again back to normal
 - b. I like the fact that it is time for football (*OK, so I'm shallow that way*)
 - 2. We squeezed in our end of summer vacation at the worst possible time
 - a. I've been preaching from our daily Bible reading through the NT
 - b. We were gone last Sunday, so I almost completely missed Romans
- B. I decided to use yesterday's daily reading, which is a strange preaching text
 - 1. There was a book entitled "*How to Enjoy the Boring Parts of the Bible*"
 - a. It was a creative look at genealogies, land divisions and Levitical laws
 - b. Romans 16 is likely in the book—a long list of people that Paul greets
 - 2. But they are more than just names; they represent lives that intersected life
 - a. They were more than just the first readers of Romans; they were family
 - b. I think there is an important message here that isn't really boring at all

I. Discussion: Paul's Family at Rome (**Romans 16:1-16**)

- A. **Factoid:** Paul wrote this letter to the Romans before he ever set foot in Rome
 - 1. Don't know how church began; assume "*strangers from Rome*" (**Acts 2:10**)
 - a. We know it wasn't planted by Paul; he'd never been there when he wrote
 - 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**)
 - b. And Paul would eventually visit Romans... as a prisoner of Caesar.
 - 2. Paul was never in Rome, but Romans has by far more personal allusions
 - a. Paul spent 3+ years in Ephesus, but Ephesians has no personal greetings
 - b. Paul greets 28 people in **Romans 16**; not bad for a place he's never been!
 - 3. Old saying was, "*All roads lead to Rome.*" Rome was center of the world
 - a. People in the first century were mobile and many ended up in Rome
 - b. There were a lot of people in Rome whom Paul knew from other places

- B. Paul sends his greetings to a list of people—some we know, some we don't
1. We recognize the husband and wife team of **Aquila** and **Priscilla** (**16:3**)
 - a. Paul stayed with them while working as a tentmaker in Corinth (**Acts 18:1**)
 - b. He calls them “*fellow workers*” who “*risked their lives*” (literally “*necks*”)
 - c. They travelled with Paul to Ephesus where they met and taught Apolos
 2. Paul mention another potentially familiar name in **verse 13**— **Rufus**
 - 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. **Phoebe** is called a “*sister*” and “*deaconess*” (διάκονος) in **verse 1**
 - 1) She is a “*servant of the church*” which sounds an official position.
 - 2) But the title that Paul stresses here is again relational (“*sister*”)
 - b. He calls **Andronicus** and **Junia** “*relatives*” and “*fellow prisoners*” (**16:7**)
 - 1) The name “*Junia(s)*” is almost certainly female (*husband-wife team*)
 - 2) Are either “*apostles*” or “*known by apostles*” (*Can woman be apostle?*)
 - 3) Point isn't female apostles (*many women listed*) but the relationship
 4. Many of the people Paul greets are singled out because of shared work
 - a. **Urbanus** is referred to as Paul's “*fellow worker in Christ*” (**v. 9**)
 - b. **Tryphena, Tryphosa** and **Persis** are “*work hard in the Lord.*” (**v. 12**)
 5. Others are just names, but there is a story behind each one (**Rom 16:14-15**)
- C. It would be easy to see **Romans 16** like the note at the bottom of 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. It would be better to leave it blank and recycle (*like Christmas fruitcake*)
 - c. No, we always you write a personal greeting at the bottom of the card.
 2. So is **Romans 16** just a message tacked on at the bottom of the card
 - a. The real message in Romans is that of salvation by grace through faith.
 - b. **Romans 16** is just a note at the end. *Not boring, but not important*
 - c. Some scholars wonder if **Rom 16** really belongs in Romans at all!

3. But I think this personal greeting at the end is part of Paul’s message.
 - a. The message of Romans is grace—live graciously with one another
 - b. We’ve seen that as we’ve read the last section of Romans this week
 - 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. So Paul ends by mentioning by name people who are precious to him.
 - a. As he does so, he shows them what “*loving one another*” looks like
 - 1) These greetings of love and family reinforce the message of grace
 - 2) Many already love Paul; he wants them to love each other as well
 - b. **Note:** Some of these names are Hebrew, some Greek, and some Latin.
 - c. Part of the problem in Rome was dealing social/cultural differences
 - d. In this final greeting, Paul shows them (and us) what church looks like.

II. Conclusion

- A. We are blessed to have a church building... and to have a new roof over it
 1. But let’s be honest and admit that the church building is a MIXED blessing
 - a. Building can easily become the focal point of church (“*going to church*”)
 - b. Do we see main point of church as 1 hour (*worship*) at 1 place (*building*)
 - c. Why? Is it because that’s what we see as most important for church?
 2. **Factoid:** The NT never really describes a first century worship service.
 - a. We’re never told HOW the first Christians conducted their worship!
 - 1) Paul does explain how to use tongue-speakers & prophets ([1 Cor 14](#))
 - 2) Don’t “*forsake the assembly*” is encouragement, not liturgy ([Heb 10](#))
 - b. Is it possible that God isn’t as concerned about the details of our worship
 - c. But God is very concerned with how we relate to one another as family
 3. Relationships Paul stresses won’t easily; that’s why Paul has to stress them

B. We have to decide whether or not we are going to emphasize relationships

1. Today is a “Sign-Up Sunday” as we kick off our Body Life small groups
 - a. This is one way that we intentionally focus on building relationships
 - b. The groups consist of Bible study, prayer time, informal fellowship
 - 1) We’ll have a study sheet each week from one of the daily Bible readings
 - 2) Emphasis isn’t only on learning Bible but learning one another.
 - c. The emphasis is also on spending time in focused prayer together
2. The real business of church isn’t done in the neat and tidy auditoriums
 - a. It is too easy here to put on a church face and pretend that all is just fine
 - b. The real business of church is lived out in messy, relentless relationships
 - c. We challenge each of you to get involved in one of these groups
3. There is a systemic flaw in using small groups to develop relationships
 - a. I don’t know what to do about it other than to name the beast out loud
 - 1) People who already have church relationships are most apt to sign up
 - 2) People who most need more church relationships most often opt out
 - b. If you have not traditionally gotten involved in a group—give it a try
 - 1) If you have a group you’ve met with, think about trying a new one
 - 2) Or stay in the same group and invite new people in (*that look needy*)
 - c. I think there is something powerful at work in worship and in preaching
4. But the power of church is lived out in relationships—*that takes work!*

C. Dr. John Fawcett was preaching at a small church in Wainsgate, England

1. In 1772, he was called to a larger church in London (*God calls us to larger*)
 - 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 one last time to send them off, probably one last potluck!
 - 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 blest tie that binds us all to God also binds us all to one another.
4. It is up to us to live out that relationship in real life and through hard work