

Introduction

- As we said last week, the relational aspects to Christianity are just as important as the theological, for true Christian relationship is the proof that you have a right understanding and application of the Gospel in your life. One cannot exist without the other.
- After commending Phoebe as a servant (deaconess) “of the church which is at Cenchrea,” a patron for ministers such as Paul, and the one likely bringing this letter to the Romans (16:1,2), Paul now begins personally greeting all those he knows in Rome.

At the Top of the List (16:3-5a)

16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
16:4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 16:5a also greet the church that is in their house.

- Paul met Prisca and Aquila, who were Romans, when they moved to Corinth during the exile¹ imposed by Claudius Caesar (Acts 18:2).²

¹ Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 69-130) writes, “the Jews he expelled from Rome, since they were constantly in rebellion, at the instigation of Chrestus” (from *The Lives of the Caesars*, “The Deified Claudius,” 25). In the first generation, most outside the Church thought of Christianity as a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:5,14; 28:22). It is believed that Suetonius mistakenly writes “Chrestus” instead of “Christ.” Believers may have needed correction in regard to a Christian’s relationship to civil government, which is why Paul wrote Romans 13:1-7.

² Claudius Caesar reigned A.D. 41-54. Claudius worked to restore old Roman religion, and forbade any other religion from proselytizing. He would be succeeded by Nero (a grand-nephew and adopted son), a wicked persecutor of the Church (I believe Nero to be the “beast...out of the sea” from Revelation 13).

- After working with Paul in Corinth, they ministered in Ephesus (Acts 18:25,26). Here they met Apollos, who, “being fervent in spirit...was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus” (Acts 18:25). Prisca and Aquila “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:26). While Prisca (also called Priscilla) had a role alongside her husband in discipling Apollos, this does not mean she was a pastor/elder/overseer.³
- They returned to Rome for a time (Romans 16:5), but eventually returned to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19).⁴
- They had a church meeting in their home in Rome. All churches were “house churches” in the first centuries.⁵

³ Wives had a role in public worship, praying and prophesying with men (Acts 2:16-18; 1 Corinthians 11:5). In our October 8 evening worship, we summed up 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 in this way: a husband and wife cannot do anything in worship that harms the Gospel testimony of their marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). Paul regulates how husbands and wives “prophesy” in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 14:29-36. Women (and wives specifically) do not have authority in the ministry of the Word as a testimony to the reality of the Fall (1 Timothy 2:12-15). I believe they may participate to some degree, but do not have leadership in this role. Balance in this area is required: we don’t exclude women from worship, but neither do we make them pastors.

⁴ They are not in Corinth when Paul writes 1 Corinthians 16:19.

⁵ While house churches are making a comeback today, too often they aren’t biblical churches. Biblical churches have the offices of elder/overseer/pastor and deacon (Ephesians 4:11,12; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-15; Titus 1:5-9). Biblical churches observe the ordinances of baptism (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16,17; 11:23-26). Biblical churches maintain a recognized membership for accountability (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Hebrews 13:17;

- Prisca and Aquila were not vocational ministers – they were “by trade...tent-makers” (Acts 18:2). All that we know about them, though, tells us that discipleship and hosting the gathering of the church were their top priorities. Notice that Paul describes their renown among “all the churches of the Gentiles,” and that they had risked their own safety to help Paul. Regardless of your vocation, do your priorities look like the priorities of these two believers? Is it any wonder that they are at the top of this list of honored believers in the Roman churches?

Beloved Saints in Christ (16:5b-15)

16:5b *Greet Epaeetus, my beloved, who is the first convert [lit., “firstfruits”] to Christ from Asia.*⁶
16:6 *Greet Mary, who has worked hard [same as 16:12] for you.*
16:7 *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen [see 9:3; 16:11,21] and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*
16:8 *Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.*
16:9 *Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.*
16:10a *Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ.*
16:10b *Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.*⁷ 16:11a *Greet*

1 Peter 5:1-3). Without this biblically-commanded structure, it is not a church, regardless of where it meets.

⁶ See 1 Corinthians 16:15.

⁷ There was an Aristobulus living in Rome at this time who was grandson to Herod the Great. Aristobulus was educated with Caesar Claudius and remained close to him (we have letters between them). Though verse numbers break these greetings up, we are probably meant to read them together: “Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman.” Herodion could have been a servant in the house named after the patriarch of the family.

Herodion, my kinsman.

16:12b *Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.*⁸
16:12 *Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard [same as 16:6] in the Lord.*
16:13 *Greet Rufus, a choice [lit., “elect”] man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.*
16:14 *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.*
16:15 *Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.*

Living Sacrifice to God the Son

- Epaeetus is described as “the firstfruits...to Christ” (16:5, N.K.J.V.). Firstfruits are offered only to God in the Bible.⁹
- If Epaeetus is being described by Paul as a spiritual offering to Christ (Romans 12:1; 15:16), it is an affirmation that Christ is God.

Beloved

- Paul frequently uses the title “beloved” in this list of greetings (16:5,8,9,12). They are not just “beloved” to Paul, but remember how he began this letter: they are “beloved of God in Rome” (1:7).¹⁰ We love each other because God has loved us in Christ.¹¹

⁸ There was a Narcissus who was part of the inner circle of Claudius Caesar. He was not a pleasant fellow, and definitely not a believer. If Paul is referring to this particular Narcissus, it was “those of the household,” and not him, who were believers.

⁹ Exodus 23:19a; 34:26a; Leviticus 2:12; 23:17; Numbers 18:12,13; 28:26; Nehemiah 10:35; Proverbs 3:9.

¹⁰ They are “beloved of God in Rome, called as saints” (1:7), or “holy ones.” READ Ephesians 1:5; 5:25b-27. God’s love for us in Christ is so that we will become holy in Him. Love without holiness is not God’s Gospel love, and, therefore, is not true love.

¹¹ See also 1 John 3:16,17; 4:9-11; 5:1.

- He has been teaching believers to love each other throughout the last section of Romans:
 - “Let love be without hypocrisy...be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (12:9,10).
 - “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (13:8). After quoting the from the Ten Commandments in 13:9 (Exodus 20:13-15//Deuteronomy 5:17-19,21), he then tells us the Law is summed up by Leviticus 19:18. He then writes: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (13:10).¹²
 - When disagreements over issues of conscience become divisive among believers, Paul warned, “you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died” (14:15).
 - Paul urged the Romans, “by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with” him in prayer (15:30).
- Prior to this, in chapters 9-11, Paul was teaching a right understanding of the relationship between Jew and non-Jew in the Gospel.

The Faithful Women

- There are at most nine women mentioned in this list: Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’ mother, Julia, and Nereus’ sister.

¹² All failure to love your brother or sister in Christ is a violation of God’s Law, and is sin. No one is right before God (justified) by their obedience to the Law (3:20). Jesus’ death on the cross paid the elect’s penalty (8:29,30,33) for breaking God’s Law (8:3). We are made right before God (justified) and at peace with Him by faith in Jesus’ saving work for us (5:1). Now we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey God’s Law (8:4). So love each other, and fulfill God’s Law.

- Paul calls them by the titles “fellow worker,” “fellow prisoner,” “apostle” (in the sense of “missionary”), and “workers in the Lord.”

Fellowship in Christ (16:16)

16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Holy Fellowship Among a Holy People

- It’s probable this is a custom adopted from Jewish practice (Matthew 26:49//Mark 14:45//Luke 22:47; Luke 7:45). Paul mentions it several times in other letters (1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).
- What do we do with this? We’re not going to start kissing during the greetings time.
- Sometimes Christians have gatherings where Christ is absent. They’re not sinful, but they’re not *Christian* fellowship, either.
- The New Testament calls us “*saints*” far more than it calls us “*Christians*” (a term used only in Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).
READ Romans 1:7.¹³
 - “*Saints*” means “holy ones,” or those set apart to God.
 - The Father chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world,” so “that we would be **holy** and blameless before Him” (Ephesians 1:3,4). Christ “loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might **sanctify** her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such

¹³ See also 8:27; 12:13; 15:25,26,31; 16:2,15.

*thing; but that she would be **holy** and blameless” (5:25-27). “Sanctify” means “to make holy.”*

- READ 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:2; 1 Peter 2:9-12.

The Importance of the Church

- Notice how prominent a role the church has:
 - “...all the churches of the Gentiles” (16:4).
 - “...the church that is in their house” (16:5a).
 - “...the brethren with them” (16:14).
 - “...all the saints who are with them” (16:15).
 - “All the churches of Christ” (16:16).
- Paul doesn’t conceive of all these individual believers apart from the local congregation. As I’ve said before, Romans and all the letters of the New Testament (including the Revelation, which was written to seven congregations in Asia Minor) were written to the local church. How much is I.H.B.C. part of your self-identity? Is that a really alien idea to you? Why do you think that is?

Union with Christ

- Notice how many times Paul speaks of these believers’ union with Christ, or, to use the language of the Gospel of John, their abiding in Christ:
 - “...in Christ Jesus” (16:3)
 - “...in Christ” (16:7).
 - “...in the Lord” (16:8).
 - “...in Christ” (16:9).
 - “...in Christ” (16:10).
 - “...in the Lord” (16:11).
 - “...in the Lord” (16:12).
 - “...in the Lord” (16:13).
- Our union with Christ is pictured in our baptism. READ Romans 6:3-11 (compare with Galatians 2:20).
- Our union with Christ is expressed using several different metaphors in the New Testament:
 - Vine and branches (John 15:5).

- Head and body (1 Corinthians 6:15-19).
- Foundation and building (1 Peter 2:4,5).
- Marriage between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-33).
- Remember that Christ is in heaven, at the right hand of the Father.¹⁴ How can we, who are on earth, be united to Him Who is in heaven? It is by the Person of God the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in the Son and in us as His people – the “one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4) is not limited by location or space (as human beings are). READ 2 Corinthians 1:21,22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30.
- All that we have in our salvation comes through union with Christ, since He alone accomplished all things:
 - We are adopted (made sons and daughters of God) by union with the One Who is God’s eternal Son.
 - We are justified (declared right) before God by union with the only One Who lived a perfectly obedient, holy, and righteous human life.
 - We are forgiven only by union with the One Who took the penalty for our sin in our place.
 - We have eternal life only by union with the One Who is “Prince of life” (Acts 3:15); we conquer death only by union with the One “it was impossible” for death to hold “in its power” (Acts 2:24).
 - We are loved because we are in union “in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).
 - All blessings come to us because we are “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).
 - Since Christ does not change (Hebrews 13:8), neither does all that is ours in Him.

¹⁴ Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55,56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.