

Romans: The Good News of God

Paul's Missionary Heart – Part 2

Romans 16:1-24

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Scripture

Today we continue and come to our penultimate study in Romans. Let's read Romans 16:1-24:

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹²Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

¹⁷I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

¹⁹For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

²²I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

[Some manuscripts insert verse 24: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*] (Romans 16:1-24)

Introduction

In the eyes of the world, Paul's frail frame was absurd, even comical, standing before the powers of Rome. Yet he changed the course of history. His heart was mightier than the entire Roman Empire. None of our lives would be as they are today had it not been for the missionary heart of the apostle Paul.

As we continue the study of Paul's great heart, we should bear in mind that the four qualities we have already considered (*Liturgical, Glorifying, Visionary, and Praying*) were essentially vertical, whereas in today's lesson we will see the horizontal aspects of his missionary heart. I do not think that apart from the Lord himself there has ever been a heart as aflame as the apostle Paul's.

Lesson

As we look at the horizontal anatomy of his great heart, my hope is that we all will be moved to some "sanctified envy" and imitation, so that our hearts will beat like Paul's heart.

I. Paul's Loving Heart (16:1-24)

The first characteristic of Paul's heart described in this chap-

ter is that it overflowed with personal love. If the long list of names and greetings in these verses teaches us anything, it is that Paul had a genuine love for people. In this chapter, the word “**greet**” appears twenty-two times, and eighteen of them are by Paul. Our text features thirty-three names. Twenty-four were in Rome (seventeen men and seven women). In addition, the apostle mentions two households, the mother of Rufus, and the sister of Nereus. Nine of the people mentioned were with Paul in Corinth (eight men and one woman). Obviously Paul maintained a remarkable number of affectionate relationships.

We do not perhaps normally think of Paul this way. We may naturally assume that though he was a great man, his greatness made him a forbidding companion. Having read through Romans, and knowing of his massive intellect, most of us would feel somewhat intimidated if we knew we were to spend an evening alone with him. We probably would spend the day brushing up on our memory work, wading through the Minor Prophets, or clarifying some points in theology. No doubt such time would be well spent, but our fears would be unfounded, for Paul was a “people person” *par excellence*. Moreover, he did not determine his friendships on the basis of intellectual capability or theological literacy.

What makes this list of those he knew in the church of Rome so amazing is the fact that *he had never been to Rome!* Most of the people he mentions are those whom he had met on his journeys and who had subsequently taken up residence in Rome.

Years ago I read that in the America’s Cup Race the tradition-conscious New York Yacht Club allowed no TV or radio on the premises. Rather, they used a tracking board on which someone in contact with the yachts moved by hand the ships on the board throughout the course of the race. Paul’s “tracking-board” heart knew where each friend was geographically and spiritually.

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 intellects, a true master of theology, was also a caring man who loved people.

Names were very important to Paul. I am told that if you visit the old Natural Bridge of Virginia you will see hundreds of names scrawled on the rocks. But high on the side of it, above almost all the names, is scratched, "George Washington." Even "The Father of Our Country" could not resist imposing his personal graffiti on nature! Our own names are music to our ears. Certainly Paul knew this. But it is also true that you learn the names of those for whom you really care. Some perceptively suggest that the reason Paul could so readily recite all these names in dictation was because of their frequent mention in his personal prayer list.

We should also note the abundance of women the apostle mentions with obvious affection. There are far more women mentioned here than in the typical literature of the day. Paul was no misogynist! As we look at the list of greetings and kind words in the first sixteen verses, we cannot escape the sense of genuine affection contained there.

It would take more space than we have to treat fully all the names, but a few selective comments will give the idea. In verses 1 and 2 Paul mentions Phoebe, whom he gives four endearing names: "**sister,**" "**servant,**" "**saint,**" and "**patron.**"

In verses 3 and 4 he greets Prisca (also known as Priscilla) and Aquila, who had "**risked their necks**" for him in Ephesus. This graphic phrase undoubtedly recalled a warm flood of memories in Prisca and Aquila.

In verse 5 he greets Epaenetus, his **first convert** in Asia.

In verse 7 the apostle says, "**Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.**" "These men are brother Jews," says Paul, "but they are even closer because they have done time with me in jail. They are outstanding believers."

In verse 10 he greets “**Apelles, who is approved in Christ.**” The commentator Bengel calls this “an incomparable epithet.” What a loving bouquet from the old soldier!

“**Tryphaena and Tryphosa**” (16:12) were probably twins who were given names that go together. Their names mean “dainty” and “delicate.” Paul employs some playful irony here because he calls them “**workers in the Lord,**” using a phrase that means to labor to the point of exhaustion. Dainty and delicate, yes—but “dynamite in small packages.”

Who was the “**Rufus**” of verse 13? Mark 15:21 identifies Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Couple this with the fact that Mark wrote his Gospel to Rome and we conclude that Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus’ cross. William Barclay writes:

Now if a man is identified by the names of his sons, it means that, although he himself may not be personally known to the community to whom the story is being told, the sons are. To what Church did Mark write this gospel? Almost certainly he wrote it for the Church of Rome, and he knew that the Church would know who Alexander and Rufus were. . . . He was the son of that Simon who carried the cross of Jesus.

The parade of names in this closing chapter of Romans repeatedly affirms Paul’s affection for his Christian brothers and sisters in Rome. The best exposition of this horizontal affection was given by Paul himself in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8:

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Warmhearted Paul’s loving example challenges us. If our hearts beat with something of the pulse of the apostle Paul, we will be “people persons” who are affectionate to each other. This is the

very plain meaning of verse 16, which completes Paul's individual greetings to Rome: "**Greet one another with a holy kiss.**" It is Biblical to express love and affection, even to the point of an embrace and a kiss. What a difference authentic Christian affection can make in a cold, indifferent world.

Some time ago, an eighty-seven-year-old widow in Grand Rapids appealed to the state to place her in a nursing home. "I don't blame people for not taking the time to see me. I'm not very interesting," she said. "Everybody I knew is dead or moved away. I'd like to talk to somebody who's alive. I'd like some company." The newspaper article reporting on her situation went on to note that except for a shopping trip once or twice a month this widow rarely left her apartment. Her typical day began at 6:30 a.m. with a breakfast of toast and coffee. Then she would water her "garden in the kitchen," which consisted of five small potted plants. After tidying up the place, she would spend the rest of the day looking out the window. Her day ended at 8:30 p.m. After a light supper she went to bed.

Perhaps we may regard this story as sad, but listen to what eminently astute observer Charles Reich writes in his book *The Greening of America*:

America is one vast terrifying anticomunity. The great organizations to which most people give their working day, and the apartments and suburbs to which they return at night, are equally places of loneliness and alienation. . . . Protocol, competition, hostility and fear have replaced the warmth of the circle of affection which might sustain man against a hostile universe.

The problem, of course, is that the Church is often as cold as the world. Sometimes strangers cannot pry a grin from church members. It is imperative that we remember that people are important. The absence of *agape* love in the typical church should burden our hearts. We must reach out in love to those around us.

The answer to this dilemma? First, *we must be "people per-*

sons.” If we are businessmen and business keeps us going so fast that people are ciphers, something is wrong. If we are scholars devoted to our books, we must remember that our books should not be ends in themselves, but platforms to launch us up to God and out toward others. The names of people around us must be important to us. We should remember them because we care.

And second, *we are to be affectionate*. Charles Swindoll tells about one time after a Wednesday evening prayer meeting when a big, burly six-footer, holding a motorcycle helmet in one hand, came up to him and said, “There’s something I’ve always wanted to do to you.” Swindoll wondered what was coming next. The man put down his helmet and gave Swindoll a big, full-bodied hug!

I am not suggesting that a big, full-bodied hug is the sign of a truly spiritual person. But Paul’s example does challenge us to a deep heart affection that shows itself in sincere eye contact, perhaps a touch, and sometimes an appropriate embrace.

We must note before we move on to the next section that though Paul was the great giver, it all came back to him! 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. Here in verse 13 of our text, when he greets Rufus he also greets Rufus’ mother, who he says **“has been a mother to me as well.”** When did she **“mother”** Paul? In Antioch when he was getting started? In some small town after a beating? At times Paul no doubt felt he could use a little mothering. Paul received back more than he gave. 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, 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 (Mark 10:29-30).

The “hundredfold” principle was alive in Paul’s life. He had

a hundred mothers, a hundred farms, a hundred brothers and sisters and children. He was the richest man in Rome!

The richest people in town are always those who love the most. “People persons”—the affectionate—those who remember names and pray for them receive the most.

So we see from the list in verses 1-16 that Paul’s heart overflowed with a personal love.

II. Paul’s Protective Heart (16:17-20)

This section is forceful and lacks the careful restraint that has thus far marked Paul’s approach to the Romans. He says in Romans 16:17-19: **“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”**

Paul briefly suggests three protective measures that need to be taken by a Christian church. First, in verse 17a, he says, **“watch out for those who cause divisions.”** Paul has no sympathy with theological sleepiness. Christians are to make a mental note of those who are off-base. Second: **“Avoid them”** (16:17b). Heretics are to be spurned. And third: **“be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil”** (16:19b). This is an echo of Jesus’ saying in Matthew 10:16: “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” This is good advice.

This no-nonsense advice eloquently demonstrates the second aspect of Paul’s horizontal love: it is *protective*. The connection is clear: When you really love people as much as Paul loved the Romans, you protect them. This is a great example for all of us. We need to love in such a way that we really put it on the line for others and speak the truth in love.

III. Paul's Contagious Heart (16:21-23)

Paul's heart is *loving, protective*, and, finally, it is *contagious*.

I picture the scene in chapter 16 like this: As Paul nears the end of dictating his letter to the Romans, his friends gather around him in the home of his gracious host, Gaius. Tertius is writing down Paul's words, and Timothy, Jason, Lucius, and Sosipater really get into the long recitation of greetings to real flesh-and-blood people. Their hearts are warmed, and all three interrupt: "Say hi for me." "Me too!" So Tertius writes in verses 21-23: **"Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you."**

We see here that a heart that is filled with love is by nature contagious.

We live in a heartless world. The last United States census missed at least 5.7 million people who were anonymous even to the census takers. Every year thousands of unidentified and even unidentifiable bodies are found across North America. And only one out of twenty such bodies ever has a name attached to it! Our society has become a breeding ground for lonely people. Life in today's world is very much like the unwritten rule in elevators: "No talking, smiling, or eye contact allowed without the written consent of management."

A survey was taken in a suburban area of Houston to find out what had motivated people to choose the particular church where they were members. Some surprising answers were given: 12 percent chose their church because of prior denominational affiliation, 8 percent on the basis of the architectural beauty of the structure, 3 percent because of the person in the pulpit, 18 percent because of convenience of location, 21 percent because of people in the con-

gregation whom they respected. But a whopping 37 percent were influenced by the fact that friends and neighbors took an interest in them and invited them.

Take Paul's heart to heart. It can make all the difference in the world and for eternity.

Conclusion

Though Paul was the supreme intellect of the Early Church, and though Paul had a heart that burned for the glory of God, as few have in the history of the world, he would not have been used like he was if he had not had a heart for people. The truly revolutionary heart is not just a visionary heart with great dreams, but a heart which loves people, a heart which remembers names, a heart with a good word for its brothers and sisters, a protective heart, and finally a contagious heart.

The beautiful Greek and Latin names in Romans 16 were the names of real people. Each name had its joys and sorrows, its cares, its hope, its trials. All drank of the common cup of human experience. These were, and are, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Someday we will walk with them in radiant white.

One of the primary human reasons this is so is that *Paul loved them*. May we have such a heart so that future generations may sing:

*For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest,
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for the life and letter of the apostle Paul. Enable us to be loving towards others, protective of the truth, and contagious in affection. Give us a zeal to see the gospel transform the lives of people in our community. And may all of this bring you honor and glory.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.