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# Romans

**. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.** Romans 16:10

Paul next requests greetings be extended to Apelles. Like many others, this is the only time he is mentioned in Scripture, but what an honor to be singled out of a congregation, recognized by the hand of the great Apostle, and be eternally recorded in God's superior word! But not all mentioned in the Bible are mentioned favorably. In fact, many times the opposite is true. And so the honor to Apelles is even greater because he is noted as one "approved in Christ."

The Greek word used to describe him is dokimon, meaning a type of approval which indicates "testing." His faith was tried, it was tested, and he proved faithful in the test. We can speculate all day as to what type of test he was given - loss of family or work, torture or imprisonment, etc. But whatever it was, it was enough to have Paul single him out as having passed the test. May we be found so worthy and so noted!

After Apelles, Paul next requests greetings for "those who are of the household of Aristobulus." This may seem curious, but there are several possibilities that would precipitate such a comment as this -

- 1) Aristobulus, though not being a believer, could have been extremely well known in Rome. Those in his household then would be those who were either family or slaves who had received Christ.
- 2) Aristobulus, whether a believer or not, could already be dead. If this is the case, then greeting only those who are of his household would make sense.
- 3) Aristobulus could be a noted Christian evangelist or missionary from Rome, but living away from Rome. If so, then it wouldn't make sense to greet him along with his household.

For one of these, or whatever other reason, the household of Aristobulus is singled out for a hearty greeting while not greeting him specifically.

Life application: Paul took time to remember those who were under other's authority even if he didn't mention them by name. Pastors have families, missionaries have children, etc. If you are greeting one, then take time to greet all. They will remember and take to heart that someone cared enough to think of them as well.

**Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Romans 16:11**

Continuing on with his greetings of so many in Rome, Paul now directs his attention to Herodion stating that he is "my countryman." This means he is a converted Jew, but possibly even of the same tribe, Benjamin, as Paul was. This can't be certain however. The name Herodion also may lead to the family of Herod mentioned in the Gospels. This also is only conjecture, but the name may imply this.

After Herodion, Paul next asks for greetings for "those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord." Again, speculation must enter into exactly what this means, but a good guess is that Narcissus was either dead, famous, or otherwise noted. In his house, and in a such a state, some of the people there

were believers, but not all. Whoever he was or whatever his state, he was well known enough by name to generate this type of note.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with identifying people who are close to you in an elevated manner. This doesn't mean they are somehow better than others, but they are of note to you. Paul has been careful to make mention of others in a way which brings people to mind while still not diminishing anyone that he may fail to acknowledge.

**Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Romans 16:12**

Paul has more people to send greetings to in verse 12. Three names are given and, again, speculation is mostly what abounds concerning them as nothing else is noted about them in Scripture. The three of them may actually be those mentioned in the previous verse which said -

"Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord."

Paul may be singling out those who are "of the household of Narcissus." Or, he may be going on with a new listing. The names "Tryphena and Tryphosa" are believed to be slave names, but they also may be the feminine of the Jewish name Tryphon. The two names are similar enough to arouse the thought that they were closely related, probably sisters, and possibly even twins. Whatever the truth of their situation, they were noted as having "labored in the Lord." They were diligent in their duties and model examples of what a Christian should be.

Paul next addresses his desire for the Romans to "Greet the beloved Persis." As she is a woman, he was careful to use the word "the" in place of "my." In so doing, he was eliminating unnecessary speculation concerning any type of close relationship, which would certainly come about. Some ancient heretical writings and even modern scholars try to find inappropriate relationships between Jesus

and Mary Magdalene. In the same way, they would also perversely attempt to do this with Paul if his words could be so manipulated. But he was careful in what he conveyed concerning her.

He notes that she was one "who labored much in the Lord." The added "much" for her may be because the first two women were named together which would form the thought of a competent team. In the case of Persis, he then might have added in "much" to distinguish that her efforts were notable through her actions alone. Again, almost all that we can guess about these three is mere speculation.

Life application; In today's world of social media and easy communications, we can easily make a comment which could be misconstrued. Photos can also be seen as inappropriate if the context isn't known concerning what happened. Let us endeavor to use our words wisely so that we don't somehow make others feel that we are acting in a way contrary to our Christian calling. However, it is also true that anyone can find fault for any reason, so be ready to defend yourself when your words and actions are in line with the Bible.

**Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.** Romans 16:13

Paul's words are now directed to a greeting for "Rufus, chosen in the Lord." The name Rufus means "red." This implies red hair and it was a common name of the time. But what may make this particular Rufus exceptional is what is found in Mark 15:21 -

"Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."

Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Christ and his two sons are specifically noted by Mark which indicates that they were probably well-known by him at the time he wrote his Gospel. This then brings in the great possibility that this is the son of the man who was there at Calvary. Paul says he is "chosen in the

Lord." This is a way of saying that he is approved of by Christ and set apart as a saint. The same type of terminology is found in Ephesians 1:4 -

"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

When one calls on Jesus Christ as Lord, they become members of Christ. God knew the selection from "before the foundation of the world" but it isn't known to us until the moment we come to Him. There is a marvelous synergism going on when a believer is directed from before creation itself to the moment where they call out to God in Christ. This Rufus was one such person, now noted by Paul.

Along with Rufus, Paul extends his greeting to "his mother and mine." It certainly doesn't mean that they were brothers, but that the mother of Rufus acted as a mother to Paul. He is tenderly noting her as if she were his own mother. This is similar to what Christ did for John when He was on the cross. This unnamed woman was a mother to Paul just as Mary became a mother to John.

Life application: The Bible is full of wonderful patterns and details. But we can't find them if we don't study it. Never tire of remembering every name, number, and location. Eventually, patterns will arise to help us see a greater picture of God's wonderful hand in redemptive history.

**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.** Romans 16:14

Five more names are given in today's verse. Nothing more is known about any of them except a few extra-biblical sources which may or may not be accurate. However, it does note that Paul asks for greetings to them "and the brethren who are with them." This then could mean that they were leaders of individual home churches or gatherings. If this is so, it would be like writing a letter to the people of Sarasota, Florida and recognizing individual churches by noting the pastors.

This isn't uncommon even today within larger denominations or among non-church organizations and so it is a distinct and even likely possibility. Because Paul knew them individually, he may have met with them and encouraged them to start a home church or group as they traveled back home to Rome. Whatever the case, Paul wanted them to be greeted.

Life application: Taking note of the leader of an organization often implies greeting the people within that organization. Should you address a group however, an additional few words such as "those who meet with you" will make those within the group feel welcome. Paul was careful to be attentive to such things and we should make a note of it and apply it as well.

**Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Romans 16:15**

As with the previous list of names, none of these are mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. "Philologus and Julia" are probably a married couple, or they could be otherwise related. The name Philologos comes from the Greek words philos - "beloved" and logos - "word." Thus his name means something like "fond of talk." This is probably a name he acquired later in life, unless he was a noisy baby at birth...! Along with these two, Paul mentions "Nereus and his sister." Because of stating this, the conclusion that Philologus and Julia are married, rather than siblings or of some other family-type relationship, is the most likely. Next the address is made to Olympas.

These are all singled out because Paul had befriended them somewhere along his travels. But along with them, he notes any that he hasn't met or who he is unaware of with the all-inclusive "and all the saints who are with them." In this statement, he is ensuring he doesn't miss someone and thus offend.

Having now gone through the entire list of names that Paul is familiar with, this is a good point to note that the church is up and running in Rome and there is no mention of Peter in the entire list. Thus, it negates the Catholic view that Peter

was there and in charge as the "first Pope." There are many other such confirmations throughout the New Testament that Peter was not ever granted such authority. It is only by misusing Scripture and individual verses that such a concept could be held to. Rather, the church was organized, efficient, and without the need of an everlasting dynasty. Instead, the saints were the church and it is to them that Paul has made these many greetings.

Life application: Tradition is often based on a misuse of Scripture or it is entirely the invention of man. Either way, overuse of church tradition and a lack of adherence to the words of Scripture are two of the most destructive impediments to sound theology and proper doctrine. The more tradition, the less the Bible is needed. Let us not error in this way, but let us hold firmly to the Bible as our final authority on all matters of our religion.

**Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.**

Romans 16:16

Paul has completed his long and meticulous list of those he singled out for personal greetings. Now, in the same thought in order to promote the general good of the congregation, and to continue the warm and deep-seated display of love, he tells them to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was, and still is, the custom in many parts of the world. The kiss is intended as a greeting just as western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul's letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another "with a holy kiss?" The answer is "No." The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies, such as the US. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

"Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died." 2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And, Proverbs 27:6 notes the following -

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend,  
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war with each other still greet with a kiss. Exchanging "kisses" with "shaking of hands" in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read this exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee -

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins,



which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is actually not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon be dead from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Paul ends this thought with, "The churches of Christ greet you." This carries on the warmth that has been transmitted so far. He has gone from personal greetings, to personal recommendations for continued harmony and love, and has finished with extended greetings from many others. He has been careful to show that the bonds of Christian love extend out in all ways and to all those who are believers.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

**Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. Romans 16:17**

After his many greetings in this chapter, and then his note to "Greet one another with a holy kiss," Paul now introduces a stern warning. He begins with "Now I urge you..." This is his way of saying, "Pay heed, lest this become a real problem." And his urging is to "note those who cause divisions and offenses." This is an obvious problem within any church where there are jealousies, backbitings, feelings of intellectual superiority, or a host of other prideful issues which arise. It has been the impetus for the destruction or division of countless churches over the millennia.

He has been writing throughout this epistle of the need for harmony between Jew and Gentile and the need for the stronger brother to accommodate the weaker one. His points of doctrine have been given to show us the correct path to righteousness and sanctification, among many other issues. Violations of these prescriptions are what he is referring to now as he says that those who cause the divisions and contentions do so "contrary to the doctrine which you learned."

In other words, this has nothing to do with those who uphold and defend the principles of the Bible. In fact, in such cases, the use of the Bible in an offensive manner is expected. The church isn't meant to wait for troubles to arise and then defend against them. They are to proclaim doctrine clearly and without restraint. However, if someone comes in with contrary doctrine, the church should already be able to recognize it and weed it out. They are to "avoid them."

Vincent's word studies, speaking of the "divisions and offenses" says that "the article with each noun points to some well-known disturbances." In other words, he was warning against what had already entered into the church, hence, the strong words given throughout his epistle. They are expected to use his letter as a basis for their actions against the offenders. Now that the epistle is written and in the Bible, we should be using it in a proactive manner. No church should fail to preach on doctrinal issues consistently and with the intent of keeping the body pure. Paul speaks in exactly this manner to his protégé Timothy -

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." 1 Timothy 6:3-5

On the other hand, in Philippians 3:17, he gives a helpful way to be proactive in such matters, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." And so we have been shown both the right way to walk and the way to avoid heading down the wrong path. Both of them illustrate a reliance on the word of God and proper instruction. Failure to adhere to these will inevitably lead to disorder, disharmony, and divisions.

Life application: The Bible is an instruction manual for life. Anyone who would start up a lawnmower and then intentionally back it over his own foot would be considered a dolt. The instructions and the little warning labels clearly show that this isn't a good option for toe-nail clipping. But this is exactly what we do with the Bible. We ignore its instructions and march headlong into life's troubles because we fail to heed the manual we have been given. Pull out the manual and read it daily. For best results, repeat several times each day.

**For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.**  
Romans 16:18

"For those who are such" takes us back to the previous verse - "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."

These people have motives that are intentionally self-directed and destructive of the church. They "do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ." The people Paul speaks of

here are comparable to the "Judaizers" he mentions elsewhere. These people were coming into the churches and teaching that one had to be circumcised and follow the law of Moses in order to be saved.

This is stated or implied in several epistles. It is also noted explicitly in Acts 15:1 -

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

They were preaching a false gospel of works rather than grace in order to steal away the brethren for themselves. If you think this was just a warning for the church in Rome, think again. It is one of the most common heresies perpetrated in churches today. Legalism and adding to what Christ has done infects almost all churches in one way or another. And it is usually introduced from within.

Those who teach such things serve "their own belly." They are directed to the lust of the flesh as if they were feeding on those they pull astray. Factions within the church are very often started by such perverse people. They hear something they don't like and, regardless of the truth, they countermand it with their own inventions of piety and supposed honoring of God.

And Paul tells how they do this. They do it first with "smooth words." This is the Greek word *chrēstologias*. This is its only use in the New Testament and is directly translated "good speaking." Regardless of the truth, they utter words which sound authoritative, honoring of God, pious, and noble. But in fact, they are words which are contrary to any of these. They have no authority because they countermand what the Bible teaches. They don't honor God because they call into question the truth and veracity of His word. They aren't pious because true piety would be honoring of God, not reviling of His word. And they lack any sense of nobility because they fail to give God the true glory He deserves. Instead of glorifying Him through the reception of grace, they dishonor him by proclaiming a righteousness of self, not of Christ.

In addition to the smooth words, they utter "flattering speech." This is the Greek word eulogias. It means adoration or praise. When we eulogize someone at their funeral, we put aside their faults and failings and heap praises upon the departed. This is what they do to those they want to capture. With pats on the back, smiles from the lips, and hearty praises, they pull away the unsuspecting for themselves and heap up condemnation in the process.

It is through these wicked devices that they "deceive the hearts of the simple." The word "deceive" is exapatōsin. It doesn't just mean to make a false impression, but to intentionally lead another astray. It is to beguile them. The implicit warning here is that we are to be well-versed in our doctrine and well trained in proper theology, lest we are swept up in their lies. As Paul warns in Ephesians 4:14, being properly trained is vital so that "we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

Instead of remaining "simple" we are to be well-trained, ready to defend, and on the guard against the devices of the people Paul warns about.

If we look at the church as if it were planet earth, we could see how these people disrupt. On the surface of the planet are storms, floods, famines, and the like. These would be comparable to those outside the church who attack and harm. But inside the earth are other forces, much more destructive - volcanoes, earthquakes, and other uncontrollable things. These come unexpectedly and cause massive harm. This is what we see in the people Paul is speaking about. They appear to be a part of the church which has a good purpose, but they spew forth only destruction.

Life application: We are saved by grace through faith. If we are saved by grace, then what can we add to that? Nothing. If we attempt to do so, then it is no longer grace and our salvation is to be questioned. "Have I truly trusted Christ alone for my salvation?" If you feel obligated to do something to merit God's favor apart from trusting Christ, you are heading down a bad path. Hold fast to what Jesus did and be ever-so grateful for His glorious provision.