

## **Romans #92** **The High Regard for Fellow Servants of Jesus Christ**

The apostle Paul had completed the substance of his message to the church at Rome, which we have already examined toward the end of chapter 15. We have before us in this last chapter of this epistle five discernable parts. There is (1) the recommendation of Phoebe to the church (vs. 1, 2), (2) a series of greetings from Paul to his friends in the ministry (vs. 3-16), (3) a warning against false teachers (vs. 17-20), a series of greetings from Paul's companions (vs. 21-23), and a closing doxology (vs. 25-27).

Let us read the passage before us, Romans 16:1-27.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup>that 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.

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

<sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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

<sup>22</sup>I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. <sup>24</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom 16:1 ESV)

### **I. The Recommendation of Phoebe to the Church (vs. 1, 2)**

Paul opens this concluding portion of his epistle by commending Phoebe to the church. He instructed the church to welcome her and assist her in whatever she might need from them. Again, verses 1 and 2 read:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup>that 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.

Here was a faithful woman for whom Paul had the highest regard. Paul “commended” her to the church. This was a formal recommendation of this lady to this church. Apparently such recommendations were commonly conveyed through letters. Paul alluded to them in 2 Corinthians 3:1: “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?” Paul desired that this church would show Phoebe the highest regard, so he wrote this word of commendation on her behalf instructing the church to have high regard for her and extend whatever help they could to her.

Phoebe is described as “a servant of the church at Cenchreae.” Cenchreae was a coastal town on the eastern side of the narrow isthmus separating the mainland of Greece from the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It was not too far to the east from the major city of Corinth and a little distance south of Athens.



The Greek word that is translated as “servant” is δούκων (deacon), which is sometimes translated as “deacon.” Because of the use of this word to identify her and due to what appears to be the official reason for Phoebe coming to the church at Rome, many have said this shows the New Testament church had women serve in the office of deacon. And so Phoebe is frequently described as having been a deaconess. As one had written, “It is impossible to be sure, but for several reasons it is likely that she held the office of a deacon.”<sup>1</sup> Just about every church that has women deaconesses in addition to men as deacons cite this verse, referring to Phoebe as a faithful deaconess.

But I do not believe this is correct, for several reasons. First, the nature of the word does not require a translation with the English word, deacon. The Greek word is translated elsewhere as “servant.” For example, we read Romans 15:8, “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness.” Here Jesus Christ is described with the same word, δούκων (deacon),

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 787.

which is translated as “servant”, but we would not say the He were a “deacon.” Second, the word does not bear the weight of being a technical term, i.e. deacon. “It is not easy to translate διάκονος (*deaconos*), for “servant” is too vague, and “deaconess” is more technical than the original.”<sup>2</sup> Third, to make allowance for the office of deaconess based on this word, would conflict with the qualifications that God’s Word provides for the office of deacon (cf. 1Tim. 3:8ff). Phoebe would not meet the qualifications for deacon that Paul would later set forth to Timothy. **John Murray** wrote of this matter:

It is common to give to Phoebe the title of “deaconess” and regard her as having performed an office in the church corresponding to that which belonged to men who exercised the office of deacon (cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Though the word for “servant” is the same as is used for deacon in the instances cited, yet the word is also used to denote the person performing any type of ministry. If Phoebe ministered to the saints, as is evident from verse 2, then she would be a servant of the church and there is neither need nor warrant to suppose that she occupied or exercised what amounted to an ecclesiastical office comparable to that of the diaconate.<sup>3</sup>

Paul commended Phoebe to the church, and then instructed the church how to receive her. Again verses 1 and 2 read,

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup>that 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.

The church was to both “welcome” and also to “help” her in whatever way she was in need. First, she was to be welcomed in the Lord “in a way worthy of the saints.” When a sinner becomes a Christian, he or she comes into a state of sainthood. God confers a status of dignity upon the believer. We are to welcome other Christians “in a way worthy of the saints.” Even though that Christian might be a stranger, unknown to us personally, if we learn that he or she is a “saint”, one set apart as holy unto the Lord, we are to recognize and show regard to that person’s privilege and stature. Paul was commending Phoebe before this church and directing them to treat her in high regard because she was a Christian.

But not only was the church to “welcome” Phoebe, but they were also to “help” her in whatever she may need of them. Perhaps Phoebe was a businesswoman who had affairs in Rome to attend. Paul does not say. Rather, any help she needed, Paul requested that the members of the church would assist her.

It is very possible that Phoebe was the one through whom Paul had sent this epistle. Paul does not say that this was the case, but it is commonly assumed that Phoebe delivered this letter to the church. For example, John Calvin wrote as a matter of fact, “He first commends to them Phoebe, to whom he gave this Epistle to be brought to them.”<sup>4</sup> This is a bit too strong. Schreiner expressed it better: “Phoebe was probably the bearer of the letter, as some of the ancient subscriptions to the letter indicate.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul exhorted the church to help her “in whatever she may need from you.” Perhaps she had other business in Rome, perhaps of a secular nature. Whatever she needed, Paul encouraged the church to assist her. The reason that Paul gave that they she treat her in this way is because “she has been a patron

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<sup>2</sup> James Denney, *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament; Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1951, vol. 2, p. 717.

<sup>3</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 19 (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 542.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 786. A subscription was a note placed at the beginning of a New Testament book or epistle in which the scribe making the copy recorded his understanding of matters such as the author, the bearer of the book, whence it was written. In the Byzantine Greek text tradition, i.e. that which underlies the King James Version, had the subscription that read, “

of many and of myself as well.” Apparently Phoebe was a wealthy lady, who was very generous to assist both Paul and the cause of Christ in other ways.

Often times the Lord will enable wealthy women to support His work being accomplished through His servants. Even the ministry of our Lord Jesus and His apostles were supported through the financial resources of women of means who assisted them. We read of our Lord’s ministry in Galilee:

Soon afterward He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,<sup>2</sup> and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,<sup>3</sup> and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-3)

Down through church history notable Christian women have served Christ’s kingdom with their financial resources. There was a lady of high regard and wealth in England in the days of the Great Awakening, the early to mid-seventeenth century. Her name was Selina Huntingdon (1707-1791), commonly known as **Lady Huntingdon**. She was a Calvinistic Methodist, and was a great friend and supporter of George Whitefield.

In 1739, Lady Huntingdon joined the first Methodist society in Fetter Lane, London, which had originally been a Moravian Brethren Chapel. After her husband’s death in 1746, she gave herself to the patronage of John Wesley and George Whitefield, later gravitating to the Calvinist Whitefield rather than the Arminian Wesley. Whitefield became her personal chaplain, and, with his assistance, founded the “Countess of Huntingdon Connexion” within the Methodist Church. She was friends with Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, and Augustus Toplady.

She founded houses or chapels in London and sponsored Calvinistic preachers to fill the pulpits. She had dignitaries and high society people attend her dinners and have George Whitefield come and personally preach to them. She was responsible for founding 64 chapels in Southern England and Wales. She partly funded the independent Surrey Chapel in which Rowland Hill preached. Following the expulsion of six Methodist students from Oxford in 1768, she started a minister’s college. It eventually moved to Cambridge.

In her will, she requested no biography of her should be written and none was attempted until 90 years after her death. She devoted herself, her fortune, her time, and her influence to the cause of Christ. She did not spend her money on herself. She did not allow the homage to be given to her. She was an important and influential promoter of the Great Awakening that transformed England, Wales, and the American colonies.

Phoebe was a faithful and generous women, a patron of both Paul and others. She was a servant, even a sister in the Lord. Could Paul have given this Christian lady a better commendation to this church?

## **II. Greetings from Paul to his friends at Rome (vs. 3-16)**

We read of a number of personal greetings extended to friends and fellow Christian workers of the apostle. Questions have arisen as to how it could be that Paul would know these people, since he had never visited Rome, having never visited this church. But although Paul’s words suggest that he knew some of these people personally, it may be that he was greeting some of them because he knew of them through their association with mutual friends. But it may be that he knew these people because he had known them in other places. Travel was common in the Roman world. An extensive highway system enabled rapid, frequent, and distant journeys. “The Peace of Rome”, the *Pax Romana*, enabled relative safe and secure travel.

But we should not fail to recognize the importance of this section of greetings in the purpose of Paul writing his epistle. These greetings reflect the personal and relational affection that the Christian community was to have among the brethren. And in expressing himself in this way, the apostle is showing the power of the gospel to transform many different kinds of persons into one people of God in Christ. Here is a good description of the role of these greetings in Paul's purpose.

The main purpose of the greetings should not be shoved into the background. Greetings express the love that was the mark of the early Christian community (John 13:34-35). Note that the many people are co-workers "in Christ Jesus" (v. 3) or "in Christ" (v. 9), beloved "in the Lord" (v. 8), tested "in Christ" (v. 10), "those in the Lord" (v.11), those who labor "in the Lord" (v. 12), or who are elect "in the Lord" (v. 13). Epaenetus is the firstfruits in Asia "in Christ" (v. 7) before Paul. The greetings express the solidarity and affection between those who belong to the Lord. They are not merely secular "hellos" but are rooted in the new life of Christ. Moreover, the Christian gospel was not a cause or ideology that trampled over the personhood of individuals. The very core of the gospel is love for others, and Paul expresses that love through his greetings. Such personal greetings are not found in other Pauline letters, perhaps because he knew virtually everyone in the churches he founded. In Romans he greets those known to him.<sup>6</sup>

These greetings, therefore, contribute to Paul's purpose of validating his gospel as legitimate before the church, as Paul was able to publish that kinds of people who loved Christ and lived for Christ and cared for one another for being in Christ. I read further Schreiner's good insight into these verses:

The Greetings, then, should be appraised as authentic expressions of love in Christ. It would be reductionist, however, to say that this is their only function. By greeting so many in Rome Paul has cited many prominent believers who are supporters of the gospel he has explicated in chapters 1-15. The Pauline gospel cannot be individualistically confined to Paul. It has preceded him to Rome through the witnesses named in this chapter. This is because of the people named here that Paul is confident (see 15:14-15) that the Romans already understand his gospel, are able to instruct one another in its contents, and only need reminders to stimulate them. By sending his greetings to well-known and respected members of the Roman churches Paul is also indirectly commending his gospel, for the persons named are in harmony with his teaching.<sup>7</sup>

Let us work through this passage and note several points of importance in Paul's greetings:

<sup>3</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup>who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. <sup>5</sup>Greet also the church in their house.

Priscilla and Aquila were some of Paul's closest friends and partners in the ministry. Paul had met this husband and wife probably about seven years prior to his writing these words of Romans 16. We read of the occasion of their meeting in Acts 18:1ff:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, <sup>3</sup>and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. <sup>4</sup>And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 790

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 792

<sup>5</sup>When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” <sup>7</sup>And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup>Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup>And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup>for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” <sup>11</sup>And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:1-11)

Aquila and Priscilla were from Rome. In AD 49 Emperor Claudius excluded all Jewish people from the city of Rome. This married couple came to Corinth, and there Paul met them. They worked together in founding the church at Corinth, perhaps laboring together for the entire 18 month period. They worked together making tents in order to support themselves even as they were in the early stages of the forming the new church. Seven years later, perhaps in AD 57, Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans. At some time Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome. They had even sponsored a church within their own house (cf. Rom. 16:5). It would seem fitting that Paul would address them first in verses 3 through 5.

Before we move on, we may say a word of application regarding the expression in verse 5, which reads: “Greet also the church in their house.” This chapter may reveal that the church at Rome was comprised of at least five house churches. This is speculative, but there may be some merit to the idea.<sup>8</sup> One was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (v. 5a). Verse 10 may suggest another, “Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.” In Verse 11 we may read of another, “Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.” A fourth and perhaps a fifth house church (perhaps even two churches) may be suggested in verses 14 and 15: “Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” A house church could perhaps have as many as 50 members. Now there are some today who look at the references in the New Testament of these house churches and they have made it into a ministry model. They in effect say, “If you really want to be in a church like the ones of the New Testament, you need to be in a house church.” Many of these folks even develop a distaste and even antipathy for a church, say, like ours, that has its own building. They assume that our church is not as valid or pure or true to New Testament churches for they meet in houses and we meet and own our own building. This is silly. It is not healthy. And worse, it is not biblical. Clearly when churches were begun they would frequently meet in the house of a well-to-do Christian. Philemon is a case in point. Paul wrote in Philemon:

“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, *and the church in your house.*”

But to argue that a church is more biblical due to where it meets is silly. Besides, the New Testament also illustrates for us that when a church reached the size that a house would not be of suitable size, that church would rent a facility large enough to accommodate the larger congregation. We read in Acts 19:10f,

But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, *reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus*. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 797

Apparently the church used this hall for its meetings and the apostle taught there daily for two years. Where the church meets is immaterial. The church is the body of believers constituted together because of their common life in Christ and mutually acknowledge doctrines taught in the Word of God.

We next read in **verse 5b**, “*Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.*” Rome was a long distance from “Asia”, which would have been in the western area of what is today modern Turkey. This man had been converted during Paul’s second missionary journey. Perhaps the account of Acts 19 describes the occasion of his conversion.

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples <sup>2</sup>he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup>And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup>Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup>Now the men were about twelve in all.

<sup>8</sup>And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup>But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup>And this continued for two years, so that *all who dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* (Acts 19:1-10)

Epaenetus was the first one converted to Christ who lived in this region when Paul first arrived preaching the gospel.

In **verse 6** we read, “*Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.*” Nothing is said of her. Of course Mary was a common name in the first century. There is probably no other reference to this Mary in the New Testament.

We then read in **verse 7**, “*Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.*” This is probably also a husband and wife team. They served the Lord together and had been in the Lord for perhaps above 20 years. If Paul were converted in about AD 36, and he wrote this epistle in about AD 57, and these two had become Christians before Paul, they could have been Christians for 20 + years.

The NKJV translates the sentence a little differently: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, *who are of note among the apostles*, who also were in Christ before me.” In fact, the NIV, the NASV, along with the KJV translate it in this way. The difference is that in the English Standard Version (ESV) Andronicus and Junia are known by and highly regarded “*by the apostles.*” But the other translations make Andronicus and Junia to be numbered “*among the apostles.*” In other words, Andronicus and Junia are identified as apostles, even exemplary apostles. Some argue, therefore, that this verse validates the continuing office of the apostle and that women may be apostles also.

The view conveyed by the ESV is a minority one among scholars. In fact, when Thomas Schreiner issued his commentary on Romans in 1998, he wrote this:

Murray (i.e. John Murray) is virtually alone among modern commentators in understanding it as “outstanding in the eyes of the apostles.” The consensus view is that the phrase means “distinguished among the apostles.” The latter is almost surely right, for this is a more natural way of understanding the prepositional phrase.

But the translation of the ESV supports Murray's view: "*They are well known to the apostles.*" It would seem, therefore, that the ESV does not reflect the view of most scholars today.

This is not a problem for us either way it is translated. Even if it does indicate that Andronicus and Junia are noted as ones numbered with the apostles, that does not make them equal to the Twelve nor does it bear the weight of the claim that the office of the apostle is still in effect, and certainly not for women also. For we must distinguish between the apostles *of Jesus Christ*, which were The Twelve (with Paul being the 13<sup>th</sup>), with those who are regarded as apostles *of the churches*, that is, they had been commissioned and sent forth by a church. The word "apostle" means "sent one." He is an ambassador who is performing a function on behalf of another. He is one who bears the authority of his sender. "The Twelve" (and Paul) were "apostles of Christ" as no others were. Through the foundational ministry of The Twelve the New Testament church established. Through them God performed great miraculous works as "signs" to show that they had a legitimate ministry. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12). But there are other "apostles" in the New Testament who may be better described as "apostles of churches." They were "sent forth" from local churches, for example, on missions. In Acts 14:14 Barnabus is clearly identified as one: "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out" (Acts 14:14, ESV). But here it describes Paul and Barnabus in this way because they had been "sent forth" or commissioned by the church at Antioch for a missionary endeavor.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup>As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup>Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. <sup>4</sup>So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4)

If in Romans 16:7 Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7) are to be identified as ones numbered among the "apostles", it would refer to these kinds of men and women sent forth on a mission from a church.

This couple, Andronicus and Junia, had also shared with Paul in that they had been incarcerated. Paul described them as "*my fellow prisoners.*" Perhaps Paul was not saying that they were jailed with him, but simply that they had been jailed for the faith as he had been. But Paul regarded them as family and fellow sufferers. They were close to the apostle's heart.

We then read beginning in Romans 16:8 and continuing through verse 16 a series of greetings to 20 specifically named persons but of a number of others unnamed who are associated with them. We will not take the time to go through the list, but we may comment on a couple of them. A great deal of early church tradition speaks to many of the names found in the New Testament.

Some argue that "Aristobulus" of 16:10 was the grandson of Herod the Great (73BC to AD 4) and the brother of Herod Agrippa (10 BC to AD 44). But this cannot be proved.

Some have said that in verse 11 the name Narcissus refers to a wealthy freedman who served the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54).

Rufus is identified in Romans 16:13, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well." There is a Rufus mentioned 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." The fact that Mark mentioned the two sons of Simon seems to indicate that they were known as Christians in the early Christian era. The mother of Rufus had helped the apostle Paul. It well might be the case this was the wife of Simon, who bore the cross of Jesus. If so, it would appear the Simon who carried the cross of Jesus part of the way to the crucifixion may himself have become a Christian, or at least his wife and apparently his two sons that are mentioned. Interestingly, in a burial cave used in the first century prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, a cave used by the

family owned by a man named Simon, Israeli archaeologists in November of 1941 found an inscription, “Alexander, the son of Simon.” Of course there is no way of knowing if this is the same father and son mentioned in Mark and the son mentioned in Romans 16, but it might have been.

Paul concludes this section of greetings with this word, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” This was the customary greeting of the day. A warm handshake would do, or perhaps a hug would be the modern equivalent.

And then Paul wrote, “All the churches of Christ greet you.” Paul sought to identify and emphasize the mutual connection that this church in Rome had with the other churches. Sometimes churches can become too isolated from other churches. There is something healthy about knowing and communicating with other churches of like faith and order. Our own confession of faith speaks to this matter:

As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification, (Ephesians 6:18; Psalms 122:6; Romans 16:1, 2; 3 John 8-10) (Article 26, paragraph 14, The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689)

Romans 16:16 would be a good proof text for this statement of faith.

Let us conclude by noting and celebrating the high regard that we are to have for one another. Paul instructed the church to value and regard Phoebe in verses 1 and 2: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup>that you may *welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints.*” Let each of us regard and welcome one another in a way worthy of the saints. And lastly, although we have considered some Christians of special achievement and stature, let us recall that what commends each of us is our relationship with one another in Jesus Christ, not because of what we have done for Christ. Few sponsor a house church or have the means to sponsor great Christian work as Phoebe, or as Lady Huntingdon whom we cited, but what might be the smallest effort on our part for the service of the Lord should be highly regarded and celebrated by us. Our Lord Jesus said, “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (Mark 9:41).