

### Paul's Greetings to Christians at Rome

#### Romans 16:1-16

Romans 16:1-16 - *"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup> that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. <sup>3</sup> Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. <sup>5</sup> Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Asia to Christ. <sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who labored much for us. <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup> Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. <sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup> Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. <sup>14</sup> Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. <sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus and 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. The churches of Christ greet you."*

#### Background Notes

As we read this long list of names of Christians at Rome at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, we are amazed at the number of Christian contacts that Paul had in Rome. Paul had not been to Rome yet, and yet Paul knew many of the believers in Rome by name, and sent them personal greetings. Paul had possibly crossed paths with some of these Christians in his missionary travels. He probably hadn't personally met some of the others, but he had been told about them.

Notice that the apostle Paul didn't just remember their names. He was aware of how they were doing -- what house church they were attending, how they were doing spiritually, and what they were doing to serve the Lord. Paul had the heart of a true pastor -- he knew the flock! What a lesson for us.

When we read of the "household" of *Aristobulus* (v10) and the "household" of *Narcissus* (v11), we understand that this means not just their immediate families, but the servants as well. You see, in the early church there were many slaves who were Christians. Many times you would have a Christian household: Christian parents, Christian children, and Christian slaves as well.

In verse 5 we learn about the church that met in the home of *Priscilla and Aquila*. Until the Roman persecutions were over, there were no public church buildings. The early Christians met in homes or other places -- even the catacombs

after the Roman persecution began. Most likely two other house churches were in view in verses 14 and 15 because of the phrases “*and the brethren who are with them*” and “*all the saints who are with them.*”

The “*Asia*” mentioned in verse 5 is not the Asia of today, where India and China are located. The “*Asia*” mentioned here was the 1st century Roman province of Asia, where eastern Turkey is located today. *Herodion* (v11) may have been a member of Herod’s family. *Rufus* (v13) may have been the Rufus who was the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Christ (Mark 15:21). If so, it would seem that the mother of Rufus, probably now a widow, had become like a mother to Paul, showing motherly affection to him.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Committed Christian women can be greatly used by God.

Verses 1-2: “*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup> that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.*” Phoebe was a committed Christian woman and she was greatly used by God. We don’t know whether Phoebe was married or not, but it seems that she was a single woman. She was from the church at *Cenchrea* a seaport town near Corinth. Most likely Phoebe carried this letter from Paul to Rome, since Paul was in Corinth when he wrote his letter to the Romans.

In verse 1, Phoebe was called a “servant” or “deaconess” of the church at Cenchrea. This does not necessarily mean that there was an official “order of deaconesses” at Cenchrea (such as we have in some churches today). The Greek word translated “deaconess” is just the word for “servant.” However, Phoebe may have been specifically recognized at the church of *Cenchrea* as having the office of a deaconess, in addition to serving the Lord in general. In any case, Phoebe was a respected servant of the Lord and highly commended by the apostle Paul. When she arrived in Rome, she was to be assisted with whatever needs she may have had.

There are many modern-day Phoebes -- committed Christian women who are greatly used by the Lord. We know a Christian woman, a single woman, who has faithfully served the Lord for close to fifty years in Africa. God has used her mightily, and many, many believers of all ages owe their spiritual lives and well-being to her. However, Christian women, don’t think that you have to go to a foreign mission field to be a Phoebe! Just commit yourself to the Lord and His work, and He will continue to open doors for service for you personally -- wherever you are. There are Phoebes right in this audience!

Notice also in verse 6: “*Greet Mary, who labored much for us....*” There’s another Christian woman used greatly by God. And look at verse 12: “*Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.*” Here are three more committed Christian women who worked hard in the service of the Lord, and whom God was using greatly. Committed Christian women can be greatly used by God.

## 2. Committed Christian couples can be greatly used by God.

Verses 3-4: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Priscilla and Aquila were a committed Christian couple. We don’t know whether or not they had children, but they were a committed Christian couple. They even risked their own lives for the apostle Paul, although we don’t have the record of when and where that took place.

Priscilla and Aquila are the most well known committed Christian couple in the New Testament. We first read about them in Acts 18, where the apostle Paul worked with them in the tent-making trade in Corinth. Priscilla and Aquila were a Christian couple who worked together making tents, and who worked for the Lord at the same time. That’s a great lesson for us!

Priscilla and Aquila moved to Ephesus when Paul traveled there, and at Ephesus they ministered out of their home. They taught Apollos, the great preacher there, and the church in Ephesus met in their home (1 Corinthians 16). Here in Romans 16, we see that they’re back in Rome, and once again a church was meeting in their home. This was a committed Christian couple that was greatly used by God.

I just wonder -- how many of their nice 1st century dishes and lamps were broken when they had all those people in their home each week? I wonder -- did their furniture get scratched up when the youth group met in their home? But what difference does it make in the long run – a few broken dishes or a few scratches in the furniture? If only more of us would catch this concept! Use your home for God -- even though your “stuff” may get damaged. Think about it -- 100 years from now, what difference will some damaged furniture matter? But 100 years from now, your commitment **now** will make a huge difference!

It looks like we have two more committed Christians in this chapter. Verse 7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” And then in verse 15 we have another couple, as well as a brother and sister team: “Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.”

Margie and I know a young Christian couple on the east coast who are really committed to serving the Lord. They serve others all the time, and in that way they’ve touched the lives of many for God. The body of Christ has benefitted tremendously because of their committed service to the Lord Jesus!

Maybe you’re a Christian couple, but you’re not committed to serving others. You can be a Priscilla and Aquila team! It’s not so much a matter of gift -- it’s mainly a matter of commitment. Committed Christian couples can be greatly used of God.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Don't forget to commend faithful believers!**

Paul always commended faithful believers. This was characteristic of the apostle Paul. What an encouragement it must have been for those believers at Rome to get this letter and see their names there!

We should do the same. When you see a brother or sister giving of his/herself for to the Lord, commend her or him. Don't discourage a brother or sister who is seeking to serve the Lord by negative comments just because their ministry or service doesn't quite meet **your** expectations or isn't exactly done the way **you** would like. Encourage them! Commend them!

I know how much encouraging comments have motivated me in my Christian walk, so I always try to do this with my students. We all have the responsibility to encourage and commend one another. We all need to do this. Don't forget to commend faithful believers!

### **2. Would you make it onto Paul's greeting list?**

In this first section of Romans 16 we've read the names of a number of faithful Christians. All these Christians were in the church at Rome, but they were not the only Christians in the church at Rome. Paul particularly singled out these Christians because they were laboring for the Lord. They were not "just attending church" -- they were involved!

Because Romans 16 is Scripture, this list was not just Paul's list -- this was **God's** list! Suppose the apostle Paul were to write a letter that began "Greeting to the saints gathered in the name of the Lord" to your home church. Would your name be included in the greeting list at the end of the letter? Would the apostle Paul know you because you're faithful and involved in the Lord's work -- or would your name be missing?

Good question, isn't it? Would your name make it onto Paul's greeting list?