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Paul's Vision of the Church

Romans, Part LXVIII

Romans 16:1-16

Stuart W. Bryan

I. The Supporting Cast

Our Lord Jesus Christ commissioned us to disciple the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all the things He has commanded (Mt 28:20). Such a task is far beyond the capacities of any one man or one church. Our calling to labor for the establishment of the Gospel throughout the world is something that we can only accomplish working in concert one with another.

Romans 16:1–16 (NKJV)

¹I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²that 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.

³Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who labored much for us. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. ¹²Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

II. Commendations and Greetings

A. Commending Phoebe (1-2 cf. Acts 18:18)

Paul speaks highly of *Phoebe* and urges the Roman believers to *welcome* her and *assist* her. He identifies *Phoebe* as a "sister", a fellow believer, and a "servant of the church in Cenchrea." *Cenchrea* was a seaport in Greece near the city of Corinth (cf. Acts 18:18). The word "servant" is the same word from which we get our word "_____", *diakonos*. In the early church, there were mature and notable women who were appointed to assist the deacons in their ministry to women in the congregation.

B. Greeting Various Saints (3-16 cf. Acts 18:1ff; 1 Cor 16:15)

Following his commendation of Phoebe, Paul _____ an array of both men and women, both Jews and Gentiles, in Rome. *Priscilla* and *Aquila* were a married couple that Paul first encountered in Corinth during his missionary travels (cf. Acts 18:1ff). *Epaphroditus* may have been of the household of Stephanus whom Paul identifies as *the firstfruits of Achaia* elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor 16:15). *Andronicus* and *Junia* seem most likely to be another married couple who had been *imprisoned* for the Gospel and were "of note among the apostles" – most likely highly esteemed by the *apostles*. The rest of the list includes a variety of men and women who are not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures.

III. Paul's Vision of the Church

A. Many Churches, One Lord (Eph 4:1-6)

First, while there are *many churches*, we share a *common Lord*. Rome was a large, cosmopolitan city. Paul's greetings here indicate that there were already several different churches in Rome (5,14,15 cf. 4,10,11,16). While there were many churches, they shared a common faith and a common Lord (2,3,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,16). The "*Church*" is larger than our local congregation. As Paul writes the Ephesians (4:1-6):

¹*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

While there are real and, at times, quite serious differences that separate us from other believers, nevertheless, with those who confess faith in the Triune God, we share a common _____. We are part of what has been called *Mere Christendom*.

B. Many Members, One Family (Pr 28:7; Heb 3:12-13)

The second thing we see in Paul's vision of the Church is that while there are many members in the family of Christ, there is but one _____. Phoebe is "*our sister*" (1). Paul extends special greetings to the "*mother*" of Rufus who is also, he notes, "*mine*" – so deeply does he love her (13). He greets the "*brethren*" who are with *Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, and Hermes* (14). And he repeatedly describes the brethren in the churches as "*beloved*" (5,8,9,12). We are part of the same family.

So consider a couple implications of this. First, there is a special loyalty which Christians are to have one to another. "*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" (Heb 3:12-13). We are to be daily encouraging one another to serve the Lord. Second, remember that our actions reflect on the family name for good or for ill. "*Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father*" (Pr 28:7). So are you walking "*in a manner worthy of the saints*" (16:1 cf. Eph 4:1).

C. Many Laborers, One Goal (Rom 1:5)

Finally, Paul's words remind us that though there are many laborers in God's field, we all serve but one _____ – the glory of God and the advancement of God's cause in the world. Paul wrote at the beginning of Romans, "*Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ*" (1:5). So Paul identifies many of these folks as his fellow laborers (2,3,6,9,12). Together, both men and women, Jew and Gentile, were working for the advancement of the kingdom and the glory of God. God has given each of us gifts and talents that we might make the reign of Christ tangible here in our community.

IV. Conclusion