

Men to Men Ministry

Lesson #: 50 of 52

Scripture: Paul's letter to the Romans.

Title of study: What is in a name?

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Romans 16:1-15, 21-23 NASB

1 I **recommend** to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea, 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the **saints**, and that you help her in whatever matter she may need of you; for she has also been a **helper** of many, and of myself as well.

3 Greet **Prisca** and **Aquila**, my fellow **workers** in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

5 Also greet the church that is in their house. Greet **Epaenetus**, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

6 Greet **Mary**, who has worked hard for you.

7 Greet **Andronicus** and **Junia**, my kinsfolk and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding in the view of the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

8 Greet **Ampliatius**, my beloved in the Lord.

9 Greet **Urbanus**, our fellow worker in Christ, and **Stachys** my beloved.

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

11 Greet **Herodion**, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of **Narcissus**, who are in the Lord.

12 Greet **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, workers in the Lord. Greet **Persis** the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

13 Greet **Rufus**, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

14 Greet **Asyncritus**, **Phlegon**, **Hermes**, **Patrobas**, **Hermas**, and the brothers and sisters with them.

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

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

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

22 I, **Tertius**, who have written this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 **Gaius**, host to me and the whole church, greets you. **Erastus**, the city treasurer, greets you, and **Quartus**, the brother.

Illustration

Here in our study area of Romans 15:1-16, we find a list of 30 specific names. Not many sermons on this list as just a people list. For most of these, we have no information as to what accomplishments, failures, impacts, or much at all. Not much in the way of commentary insights. These verses slip by in eternity. Each stepped into the annals of Christianity with little fanfare or accolades. Sure, we read them as words and not sounds and they make little difference to us. They could be more modern names and they would make little difference. Apelles could be just Andy, or Narcissus as Nick but just changing the name would not make them memorable. So I must ask the simple question: What is a name?

When you get to heaven, you will have eternity for greeting your friends and relatives, walking down golden streets lighted by the Light of God in your new body, and feeling pure joy and peace, it will be a wonderful day.

But on your path coming in your direction is a fellow traveler. You have no recollection of this man with a great smile on his face but he seems to be excited to see you. He runs the last couple of feet and gives you a great big hug. A little awkward but it is OK.

You wonder if you should know this guy. You take a moment and rack your brain for some sense of understanding. You recall all those you have met while you lived your life and are now here in Heaven. With the warmth of the embrace still on your mind, you ask, “Do I know you?”

He responds, “I am APELLES the tried, true, and the approved.”

It seems to you that he assumes that you would know him intimately. His expectation was as if he was one of the lost members of your family that you lost touch with. So, you shake your head ever so slowly.

APELLES with a smile and trying to help you out, states, “You remember, it was that Bible study you had at Liberty Towers Church on Wednesday, April 24, 2024. It was in a portable back behind the sanctuary. You were there because of the light refreshments. Don’t you remember “Larry the Just” led you in prayer, fellowship, and Bible study? You were studying Romans the 16 chapters.”

A foggy memory comes to you. “Yeah, I remember that night, but I don’t remember you being there, but it was a long time ago. Were you there?”

With an ever-brightening smile, APELLES says, “I was in the great cloud of witnesses cheering you on. And you read my name. Not many take the time to say it out loud anymore, but I was there.”

What is in a name?

Shakespeare wrote: *“What is in a name? A rose is a rose is a rose, that which we call a rose, by any other word, would smell as sweet.”*

Today a name is a method of telling people, places, and things apart. They are given to us by our parents. The name itself does not have much significance. It may be the name of a favorite relative, a current actor, or a celebrity. We had no input into the name given to us.

I will confess I thought many times what I should be named. If my Mother and Father had named me Andronicus, would I have turned out differently than I am today? How about Forest, Everest, or even APELLES?

Occasionally, we are given a nickname. A brother or a sister or even one of your parents may call you: Pooke, Pumpkin, Scooby, Bubba, or Bud. Some names are just shortened for convenience's sake, like Tom for Thomas, Chuck for Charles, or Theo for Theodore. Others just use their initials, like AJ for Andrew James, JFK for John Fitzgerald Kennedy, or LBJ for Lyndon Banes Johnson. My mother disliked her name Mable she went by her middle name Arline.

Names are important to us. It is the differentiator of who we are. It is how we introduce ourselves. With the exchange of names, we change our status from stranger to acquaintance. If you are walking in a crowd and someone uses your name you immediately pay attention.

A well-known performing artist, Jonny Cash sang a song about a "Boy named Sue". It was about a baby named after his father SUE. Sue's father deserted the family at the age of three. The song goes on how that name caused him to grow up always in trouble, always fighting because of his name. In an old bar much later he meets his father and they fight each other in the "mud, blood, and the beer." His father landed on the floor got up with a knife, and cut off a part of his son's ear. After the brandishing of guns, the father explained:

*"Son, this world is rough
And if a man's gonna make it, he has to be tough
I knew I wouldn't be there to help you along
So I gave you that name, and I said goodbye
And I knew you'd have to get tough or die
It's that name that helped to make you strong"*

*He said, "Now you just fought one heck of a fight
And I know you hate me, and you got the right to kill me now
And I wouldn't blame you if you do
But you ought to thank me before I die
For the gravel in your gut and the spit in your eye
'Cause I'm the son of a bitch that named you Sue"*

The boy named Sue threw down his gun and hugged his father and they left each other. Sue made a decision that night:

*Well, if I ever have a boy, I'll name him
Frank or George or Bill or Tom, anything but Sue.*

My name is Larry. Larry is the 46th most popular first name in the United States. There are 992,968 of us. It is most popular in Texas. It is a male name 99.5% of the time. My last name is Monson. There are only 13,730 here in America. But put them together, "Larry Monson" there are only 87 of us.

What is strange there are 19 Americans who have the first name APELLES.

In the Old Testament if you mentioned a name it would include with it the reputation, the fame, and the glory associated with it. The people of Israel would name their children with their associated hopes and future expectations. It became a mark or a brand. We call Jeff Thompson

“DOC” because we expect him to examine the vocabulary and ideas we present here in the Bible study.

This is a list of the names and the title or fame of the person. This table provides a categorization of their claim to a moment when Paul acknowledged them. Some of the personal names are included in more than one fame name and are **bolded** to indicate this status.

Name	Fame Name		IN
Phoebe	Commended	to set together, that is, by implication to introduce to exhibit; intransitively to stand near, approve, commend, consist, make, and stand with.	Cenchrea Church Port city for Corinth.
Phoebe	Sister	sister , fellow countrywoman; by extension a female believer, a sister in the family of faith	Cenchrea Church Port city for Corinth.
Phoebe	Servant	servant , minister, a person who renders service and help to others, in some contexts with an implication of lower status; also transliterated as deacon, a trusted officer of help and service in the local church	Cenchrea Church Port city for Corinth.
Phoebe	Saints	sacred (physically pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially consecrated): - (most) holy (one, thing), saint .	Cenchrea Church Port city for Corinth.
Phoebe	Helper	a woman set over others. a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources	Cenchrea Church Port city for Corinth.
Urbanus Tryphosa	Workers for a church	a companion in work, a fellow worker	In Christ Jesus
Prisca Aquila Timothy Tertius Quartus	Workers for a group	a companion in work, a fellow worker	For the churches of the Gentiles
Mary Gaius Erastus	Workers for Rome	a companion in work, a fellow worker	For the churches in Rome
Tryphaena Tryphosa Perseus	Workers for Jesus	a companion in work, a fellow worker	Jesus
Epaenetus Ampliatius Stachys Persis	Beloved	dearly loved one; the object of special affection and special relationship, as with Jesus the beloved of the Father, in the manner of AGAPE	Lord
Epaenetus	Convert	Firstfruits, The first portion of the dough, from which sacred loaves were to be prepared. Persons consecrated to God for all time.	To Christ Jesus
Andronicus Junias	Kinsfolk	family, relative, one's race or people	Jewish Convert

Herodion Lucius Jason Sosipater Quartus			
Andronicus Junias	Prisoners	fellow prisoner	Paul's companions In Christ
Andronicus Junias	Outstanding	notorious, prominent, outstanding, well known	Among the Apostles
Apelles	Approved	approved by testing, genuine	In Christ
Rufus Mother of Rufus	Choice	elect, chosen, the Chosen One picked out from many	In the Lord
Aristobulus Narcissus	Household	This association is by inference and is simply part of THE it is used to be an inclusion of a household	Family
Asyncritus Phlegon Hermes Patrobas Hermas Philogues Julia Nereus Nerues' sister Olympas	Name alone but Greeted	Greet: to draw to one's self to salute one, greet, bid welcome, wish well to receive joyfully, welcome	

Our Study

The church was made up of a diverse population that had found peace in Jesus. They were growing in God's grace. They served God as well as they could. They learned to love one another.

When you come to a section of Scripture like Romans 16 with its long list of names, it's good to keep in mind Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**" These verses, along with the lists of genealogies in the Bible, are inspired by God for our spiritual profit to equip us for every good work. So rather than skip over them quickly, we need to think about, "**What food for my soul is here for me?**" Dug a bit, but come up with some nuggets that make the search worthwhile.

Paul isn't deliberately teaching here. Rather, he is greeting his friends in Rome and sending greetings from some who were with him in Corinth. But the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write these greetings to teach us.

It is about two churches: A struggling Church in the Capitol of the World of the Gentiles, (Rome), and from a church that Paul called home for two years.

Can we take from these two examples and see ourselves? I think if we slow down and understand these commended and greeted ones, we will see ourselves in the scripture's mirror. Is much about the church

we ought to be. The individuals greeted here can motivate and encourage each of us to be all that God wants us to be.

The church is made up of ordinary, diverse people who know the Lord, are growing in Him, serve Him, and love one another.

I can't comment on every name, but I want to point out seven features of this snapshot of Paul. I am reminded they were real people. These verses show that Paul knew many of the saints in Rome by name and some of them closely, even though he had not yet visited Rome. The chapter brims with personal relationships that reflect Paul's love for people. The best theologians are those who can form loving relationships.

1. Ordinary, diverse people who are "In the Lord"

The phrase is **KURIO**: A favorite Pauline expression, denoting the intimate union and fellowship of the Christian with the Lord Jesus Christ which supplies the basis of all Christian relations and conduct, and the distinctive element in which the Christian life has its specific character.

Sister Phoebe was a servant of the Church which is in Cenchrea (16:1). Many writers have agreed that Pheobe was the messenger to the Roman church who carried this letter to all the house churches. Most likely she was a single, wealthy businesswoman, who saw her life as a fulfillment of God's will.

The name **Pheobe** is Greek and therefore a Gentile. It seems from this list most of them are Gentile. Both the Church in Corinth and Rome were predominantly Gentile. Further, the majority of the names are those of either slaves or freedmen (freed slaves). **Aristobulus** (16:10) was a grandson of Herod the Great and was a close friend of Emperor Claudius. When Herod died, his slaves would have become the property of the emperor, but would still be called "the household of **Aristobulus**." The following name, **Herodion**, probably refers to a Jewish slave or freedman who was a part of that larger household of **Aristobulus** now in the emperor's service

The household of **Narcissus** (16:11) also probably referred to the slaves belonging to a wealthy, freedman who was also friends with Emperor Claudius. When Nero came to the throne, his mother Agrippina forced **Narcissus** to commit suicide, so his slaves also would be part of the royal household.

Tertius, Paul's secretary in Corinth (16:22), and **Quartus**, whom Paul simply calls "the brother" (16:23), were probably slaves. Their names mean "Third" and "Fourth." They weren't even the number one or number two slaves. **Tertius** had the very important task of accurately recording Paul's dictated words. **Quartus** is no longer just the fourth nameless slave but is "the brother," a noble designation.

Further, Paul mentions **Erastus**, the city treasurer, an important public position. An inscription has been found in Corinth mentioning **Erastus** who was the public works administrator. It may refer to an earlier or later job of this same man who was now city treasurer. So in the church in Corinth, you had low-level slaves right next to **Erastus** the important official.

Prisca and **Aquila** (16:3) were fellow tentmakers and fellow Jews with Paul, as were the others in this chapter whom he calls "my kinsmen" (16:7, 11, 21). There were tensions between the Gentile and Jewish segments of the church in Rome. Paul desperately wanted these diverse groups to work out their differences and grow in love as one body in Christ.

One other man who was probably a Jew was **Rufus** (16:13). A “**Rufus**” is also mentioned in Mark 15:21, where Mark says that his father was Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to carry Jesus’ cross. Since Mark’s gospel was probably written for the Romans, the Rufus there may be the one Paul greets here. If so, Rufus’ father was a Jew from Cyrene (modern Libya), who had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover. Through his forced encounter with Christ and the cross, he came to faith in Jesus. Luke mentions that when the gospel first went to Antioch, it was men from Cyprus and Cyrene who first preached it there (Acts 11:20). It’s possible that Simon of Cyrene was one of those men. His son **Rufus** was now a prominent member of the church in Rome.

We don’t know why Paul singles him out as “a choice man in the Lord.” The Greek term is, “elect” or “chosen” in the Lord, which is true of all believers.

So the church in Rome was made up of these ordinary but diverse people. Some were slaves, others were blue-collar workers, and still others were wealthy. Some were men, but Paul mentions several women. What drew them together and united them? We find the answer in a phrase that Paul repeats eleven times in these verses: “in the Lord” or “in Christ.” Again he mentions **Phoebe** “in the Lord” (16:2). He commends **Prisca** and **Aquila** as his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (16:3). He says that **Andronicus** and **Junias** “were in Christ before me” (16:7). He calls **Ampliatius** “my beloved in the Lord” (16:8). **Urbanus** is “our fellow worker in Christ” (16:9). **Apelles** is “the approved in Christ” (16:10). Paul sends greetings to those of the household of **Narcissus**, “who are in the Lord” (16:11). **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa** are “workers in the Lord” (16:12). **Persis** the beloved “has worked hard in the Lord” (16:12). **Rufus** is “chosen in the Lord” (16:13). And **Tertius**, Paul’s secretary, sends his greetings “in the Lord” (16:22).

As we’ve seen in Romans, being “IN CHRIST” through faith is the most important designation that can be true of anyone. Whether you are wealthy or poor, ordinary or important, male or female, no matter what your background, those eternal blessings are offered to you in Christ Jesus if you will trust in Him as your Savior. What a tribute to the glorious gospel that saves ordinary, diverse people from every walk of life and places them “in Christ”!

2. The church is made up of ordinary people growing to know the Lord through sound doctrine.

It’s significant that although Romans is the most doctrinally deep letter in the New Testament, it was written to help common people, many of them slaves, to know Christ and grow in their walk with Him.

It was a letter to real people and, as far as we can see, to ordinary people; it was not written to professionals. As we have dug deep in our study of Romans, it would be easy to overlook the fact that it was addressed to people like **Ampliatius**, **Tryphena**, and **Rufus**. Paul wrote to these ordinary people to help them to a greater understanding of the grace of God. They all were People in Need of Grace and Mercy (PINOGAM).

We live in a day when doctrine is shoved aside because supposedly it is either divisive or impractical. But Paul would have vigorously disagreed. He spends 11 chapters laying a solid doctrinal foundation before he gets around to the so-called practical section of this letter. And as

noted, it was written for ordinary Christians, not just for theologians or scholars. It takes some mental effort to grapple with these profound truths, but it's well worth the work!

3. The church is made up of diverse people who are deepening their relationships with one another in the Lord.

Paul called out at least 30 people. We would be amiss if we missed the mention of the special four. He mentions five of them as being especially close (“my beloved” or “the beloved”; 16:5, 8, 9, 12), including **Epaenetus**, who was the first convert in Asia. He calls **Phoebe** “our sister” (16:1) and **Quartus** “the brother” (16:23). He mentions **Rufus**’ mother as being his mother (16:13). She had ministered to Paul as a mother would, perhaps when he was ill. **Prisca** and **Aquila** had risked their lives for Paul. There was a close bond between them because of their actions. He also directs the believers in Rome to greet one another with a holy kiss (16:16), a common custom in that culture (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14).

Notice *the different the relationships and partnerships*.

It is remarkable the words that he uses to describe who these people are in relationship to him and to each other: sister, brother, servant, saints, patron, fellow workers, church, firstfruits, kinsmen, fellow prisoners, beloved, approved in Christ, elect, mother to me.

The more you connect with people the more different and the more enriching are the ways that they bring blessing into your life—and you to theirs.

All of these personal, warm greetings reflect the love between Paul and these believers and between all believers. Remarkably, Paul could remember all of these names! Paul took a personal interest in people, and so should we. **We are not called to be Christians in isolation, but rather in relationship with one another.**

4. The church is made up of people who are family and thus are hospitable and helpful toward one another.

Paul urges the church to extend hospitality to **Phoebe**, whom he calls “our sister.” She was family. **Quartus** was “the brother.” **Prisca** and **Aquila** opened their home to host the gatherings of the church (16:5), which they also did in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19). Probably the two groups mentioned in 16:14 & 15 represented other house churches, which could perhaps hold as many as 70 or 80 people. In Corinth, **Gaius** hosted a church in his house (16:23).

For at least the first two centuries, churches had to meet in homes due to persecution. There is a renewed interest in small groups in our day. They have the **advantage** of forming close relationships, allowing for closer shepherding, and involving every member in ministry. They have the **disadvantages** of lacking solid teaching and getting off track doctrinally if they lack trained leaders. They can also spawn relational conflicts that come from being overly involved in one another’s personal affairs. Also, if they don’t maintain an emphasis on outreach and healthy growth by division, they can become ingrown. Small groups provide all of these advantages and disadvantages! But they’re worth the risk

5. The church is made up of people who work hard together for the Lord.

Paul repeatedly mentions how these people were involved in serving the Lord. **Phoebe** was “a servant of the church in Cenchrea,” a port city near Corinth (16:1). She may have held an official position as a deaconess (1 Tim. 3:11), although some scholars dispute this. But even though she probably was busy as a single businesswoman, she was devoted to serving the church.

Paul calls **Prisca** and **Aquila** “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (16:3). Paul met them in Corinth, where they worked together as tentmakers after they had been forced to leave Rome when Claudius expelled the Jews (Acts 18:1-3).

Paul always calls her Prisca, the more formal name. Luke uses Priscilla, which is a diminutive nickname (like Liz for Elizabeth). They later accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where after Paul left they helped Apollos get straightened out in his doctrine (Acts 18:24-26). Now they had moved back to Rome. Still later, they would move back to Ephesus again (2 Tim. 4:19). Wherever they went, their hearts were for building up the church. Husbands and wives can find great joy in working together for the Lord. Husbands, if you and your wife host a home fellowship, help her with the work!

Paul also mentions Mary, “who has worked hard for you” (16:6). He calls **Urbanus** “our fellow worker in Christ” (16:9). **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa** (probably sisters, whose names mean Delicate and Dainty) were not fragile—they were “workers in the Lord” (16:12)! **Persis** (another woman) “has worked hard in the Lord” (16:12). And he calls **Timothy** “my fellow worker” (16:21).

As we saw in chapter 12, every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift that he or she is to use in serving the Lord. There should be no benchwarmers in the body of Christ.

First Peter 4:10-11 puts it like this:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So the church is made up of ordinary, diverse people who are “in Christ.” These ordinary people are growing to know the Lord through sound doctrine. They are deepening their relationships with one another, being hospitable and helpful to one another as family. They work hard together for the Lord.

6. The church is made up of whole families that have come to faith in Christ through the gospel.

Paul mentions two households (16:10, 11), which refer to both the biological family members and the servants, plus Rufus’ mother and Nereus’ sister (16:13, 15). In the Book of Acts, we see whole households coming to faith (2:39, “you and your children”; 10:1-48, Cornelius; 16:15, Lydia; 16:31-34, the Philippian jailer). We all have between 8 and 15 people whom we have natural bridges, whether as a biological family or people whom we rub shoulders with every day. They’re the ones that we should pray for and, as God opens the door, share the gospel with. So

make a prayer list of these 8-15 people and ask God to show them their need for Christ and to allow you to tell them the good news.

Conclusion

None of the people listed in Romans 16 were famous or powerful in the world's eyes. None of them knew that their names would be enshrined in Scripture for millions of Christians down through the ages to read. Even though our names will never be in Scripture and none of us will probably be recognized or remembered by the world, God knows your name and you are important to Him.

He sent His Son to rescue you from sin and judgment. He has given you an important role to play in His kingdom purposes. It may be to be a loving homemaker and to rear your children to love and follow Christ. It may be to set a godly example as a loving husband and father. It may include serving in some capacity in the local church or the cause of world missions. It may be to tell your neighbor the good news of Jesus Christ and to explain to him (or her) how he can have his sins forgiven and go to heaven.

Whatever your gifts and calling, the most important thing is that you know that Christ has saved you from eternal judgment because you have put your trust in Him as Savior and Lord. Then look for ways that you can serve the Lord, as these people did. Read through the descriptions again and ask yourself, "How would Paul have described me if he had known me?" William Barclay observes "It is a great thing to go down to history as the man with the open house or as the man with the brotherly heart. Some day people will sum us up in one sentence. What will that sentence be?"