

Unashamed (25): Paul and His Brothers and Sisters

(Romans 16:1-16)

I. Introduction

- A. If you had to choose the “official” Church of Christ Bible verse, which verse would it be?
1. That’s easy! That would be **Acts 2:38**, “*Repent and be baptized...*” That’s our verse
 - a. **True Story:** Youth group passed another group van on the way from youth rally
 - 1) Other van had “*Church of Christ*” painted on it, but they were in a rented van
 - 2) They tried to flag it down, but couldn’t get the other youth group to pull over
 - b. So they wrote “*Acts 2:38*” and held it up to window; van immediately pulled over!
 2. But if **Acts 2:38** isn’t our unofficial official verse, then it has to be **Romans 16:16**.
 - a. It’s where we get the name of our tribe, “*The churches of Christ salute you*” (KJV)
 - b. This isn’t the **only** Biblical name for the church (“*Church of God*” appears 7 times)
 - 1) Try calling a congregation “Church of God” and see how Biblical that is!
 - 2) We had a bumper sticker, “*Churches of Christ Salute You (Rom 16:16)*”
 3. But there is another part of that verse too, “*Greet one another with the holy kiss.*”
 - a. We used to have a deacon who was very Biblical—gave out holy kisses each week!
 - 1) Fortunately for me, he was only interested in being Biblical with the ladies
 - 2) Suspiciously, he seemed more interested in being Biblical with pretty ladies
 - b. **Romans 16:16** is our text today—not really the kiss part, but the “*greet each other.*”
- B. This is next to last lesson in Unashamed series; I’ll preach in a black armband next week
1. In **Romans 16:1-16**, Paul gets a bit personal with his final greetings and goodbyes
 - a. I think we established rather definitively last week that Paul has not been to Rome
 - b. He’d never personally visited this church, but this is longest greeting of any letter
 - 1) He spend 3+ years at Ephesus, yet book of Ephesians has NO greetings
 - 2) Paul greets 28 people here by name; not bad for a place that he’s never been!
 2. As we said last week, “*All roads lead to Rome.*” Rome was the center of the empire
 - a. Roman society was mobile; they made us of those roads and tended to get to Rome
 - b. There were a lot of people in the church at Rome that Paul knew from other places
 3. Remember HOW Paul’s letters were communicated—were read aloud to the church
 - a. There was no mimeograph to make copies; this was read in everyone’s hearing
 - b. When Paul singles people out for greeting and affirmation—everyone heard it!

II. Paul and His Brothers and Sisters

A. Some of the names that Paul mentions are already very familiar to us

1. This is particularly true of second and third names, **Priscilla** and **Aquila** (**16:3-4**)
 - a. This was the husband and wife team that Paul had met while at Corinth (**Acts 18:1**).
 - 1) They were instrumental in teaching Apollos, who became a powerful voice
 - 2) They had worked alongside Paul, and he says they risked their lives.
 - b. They were from Rome and were among the Jews expelled by the edict of Claudius
 - c. Now they are back in Rome, instrumental in trying to put the church back together
2. There is another familiar name here, or maybe a familiar name—**Rufus** (**Rom 16:13**)
 - a. Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene (**Mark 15:21**). *Was this the same guy?*
 - b. Paul calls him “*chosen in the Lord.*” Is it because his father helped carry the cross?
 - c. Paul considered Rufus mother to be his own mother. *Very relational, right?*

B. Paul also greets many here that we don't know anything about except what he says

1. **Phoebe** is called “*sister*” and “*deacon*” or “*servant*” (word is διάκονος) (**Rom 16:1-2**)
 - a. She is a “*servant of the church in Cenchreae*” which sounds an official position.
 - 1) Most English versions translate one way and then give the alternative in notes
 - 2) Paul holds her in high esteem and says that many are in her debt, including him
 - b. It would be nice to know what the backstory of Paul Phoebe is, but we don't
 - c. But the emphasis here is on “*our sister,*” again the emphasis is very relational
2. Then there is his intriguing greeting given to **Andronicus** and **Junia**. (**Rom 16:7**)
 - a. This is fought over because Paul says they are “*outstanding among the apostles*”
 - 1) Junia is almost certainly feminine name; this more than likely a married couple
 - 2) And they are called apostles here? Or are they famous among the apostles?
 - b. Both interpretations are possible; they hinge on extreme subtleties of Grk grammar
 - c. **Point:** Paul commends their work and close relationship to them... in their hearing!
3. Listen and you'll notice two things that these people share with Paul (**Rom 16:8-12**)
 - a. **A common work**—he stresses a relationship forged in a shared work in Christ
 - b. **A common love**—he stresses their friendship and their bond in Christ Jesus
 - 1) Most of these names are just names, but there is a story behind each (**16:15-16**)
 - 2) Paul reminds them of love he has for them-- reminds them to love each other!
 - 3) This isn't just a list of names; Paul is refocusing us on the message of his book

III. Conclusion

- A. It would be easy to see **Romans 16** like the note on the bottom of a Hallmark card
1. We buy cards with inspirational messages by Helen Steiner Rice or someone
 - a. The message may be perfect, can't just sign it! *You have to write personal note*
 - b. I always buy a card with a lot of writing and not much space—*can't write too much!*
 2. So is **Romans 16** just the personal message Paul tacks on to the bottom of the card
 - a. The message here is salvation by grace through faith; this is just the personal note?
 - b. No, in the truest sense, these personal greetings serve to reinforce Paul's message
 3. If we're "unashamed of the gospel of grace," then we'll live graciously toward others
 - a. Grace isn't just how God saves us— even though we don't really deserve it
 - b. It's living graciously in relationships (**12:3, 12:13,16, 13:8, 14:1,13, 15:5-6, 15:7**)
 - c. By listing these names, Paul tells us how important it is to live in relationships
- B. Living graciously in relationship will not just happen in our busy, bullet-paced world
1. With that in mind, let me introduce your summer project— "*Fellowship Challenge*"
 - a. We challenge those who can to host people in homes for a meal ("*those who can*")
 - b. What is "*hosting*" a meal? Home cooking. Catered. Cold cuts sandwich. \$5 pizza
 - c. *Restaurants don't count!* **Point:** Something about visiting around table in a home
 2. **Fellowship Challenge:** Take selfie of the group at the table; show them each Sunday
 3. In hosting these meals, "*The Jesus Rules*" will always apply (**Luke 14:12-14**).
 - a. Don't just invite people you know or people you know will invite you back.
 - b. Invite those you don't know, who need a dinner, who need to be welcomed.
 - c. When invited, say "Yes!" Go! Most frustrating about hosting is getting guest!
- C. Back to Paul. He ends his letter mentioning a list of people who are precious to him.
1. Some of these names are Hebrew, some are Greek, and some are Latin.
 - a. Differences in race, nationality and politics made a huge difference in Rome
 - b. The church had problems because they'd let those differences matter in church
 - c. But those differences make no difference in Christ... are all one in Christ Jesus
 2. In this list of names, Paul shows them, and he shows us, what church is looks like.
 - a. In **Revelation 7**, we are given this glimpse of the church triumphant (**Rev 7:9-10**)
 - 1) Church in heaven is made up of every nation, tribe, and people praising God
 - 2) God's will earth be done as it is in heaven, and His church be as it is in heaven