

“Biographies”
Romans 16:5-16
(Preached at Trinity, February 26, 2012)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've spent a couple weeks so far in this last chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As we've seen, the majority of this chapter contains a list of individuals of which Paul gives commendation. It is actually two lists.
 - A. The first list, **Verses 3-16** contain Christians from the Church of Rome.
 - B. The second list, **Verses 21-23**, contain people from the Church of Corinth, the city from which Paul is writing – a total of 8.
 2. None of these names should be dismissed. Paul under the Divine guidance of the Holy Spirit is calling out people by name. He is giving us a brief biography. Passages such as this testify to us that God is mindful of His people, of individuals and churches. He is watching you. We read over and over in the seven letters of Revelation: "I know your deeds."
 3. Some of these individuals we know very little about, but God knows them intimately. He formed them in their mother's wombs and determined the boundaries of their habitation.
 - a. Each of them have gone the way of humanity – they lived, and they died, and for most, have been long forgotten—but not in the knowledge of God.
 - b. The point is this. Although most of our lives are forgotten of men, God has carefully recorded every detail. And we all will be called to give account.
 4. This morning I want us to briefly look at these various individuals in this first list – brief biographies of men and women from the church of Rome; people whose lives are over. The things they did and the decisions they made cannot be erased. May their biographies remind us of our own biography. Part of it has already been written. It can never be changed. Part, however, is still being written.
 5. We've already looked at three of these names—Phoebe, Priscilla, Aquila. I want to briefly set the others before you. God has preserved them for us to remember. They all have much to teach us
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1. **Verse 5 - "Epaenetus"** – All we know of him is what Paul tells us here, but he tells us much. He was the first convert from Asia. And he was greatly loved by Paul. We get another glimpse into Paul here. Evangelism must never be viewed in a mechanical way—adding numbers. The best evangelism is built upon relationships. Paul loved this man.
 2. **Verse 6 - "Mary"** – There are many Marys in the NT. This Mary probably isn't any of the ones we are familiar with since Paul writes that she worked hard for the Roman church. The word is κοπιᾶω – It refers to wearisome toil. This was her call to fame – she worked for the church to the point of exhaustion. What a model for us to follow, especially in a day when many seldom do anything for the church. We should also take special note of this. . .

Of the first five people Paul mentions three are women. We can never underestimate the importance of women in the church. Some presume that because women cannot hold an office in the church their work is insignificant. What foolish thinking. Paul speaks of three women who were of great value to the church—Phoebe, Priscilla, and now Mary.

3. **Verse 7 - "Andronicus and Junias"** –

Andronicus is masculine but Junias could be taken either way, depending on the accent mark. The KJV (TR) makes it feminine while the NA²⁷ makes it masculine. If it is feminine then it might imply that this was husband and wife.

Paul says four things about these two:

- A. They were his kinsmen – He could be saying that they were a part of his extended family. More likely, they were Jews. (see also **Verse 11 - "Herodion"**). This was also his use of the word in Chapter 9.
- B. They were his fellow prisoners – they had been formerly imprisoned with Paul.
- C. They were outstanding among the apostles
 - (1) It could mean that they were to be included among the apostles which must be rejected. But there are two possibilities of proper interpretation:
 - (2) It could mean they were outstanding in the estimation of the apostles.
 - (3) Paul could be using the word “apostle” in the more generic sense. Barnabas, Epaphroditus, Apollos, Silvanus, and Timothy are all called apostles. The word means “one sent.” All of these men were sent forth to evangelize. And this would include Andronicus and Junias.
- D. They had been Christians longer than Paul – probably dating back to the early converts in Jerusalem. Although either use of the word “apostle” could be accurate, it would seem that the length of their service to the church had made them well known and esteemed in the eyes of the Apostles. Faithfulness seldom goes without recognition.

4. **Verse 8 - "Ampliatius"** – The only thing we know is that Paul loved him. Paul loved his kinsmen, his fellow Jews, but Paul refers to this man as “beloved in the Lord.” Paul loved him as a fellow believer. This relationship transcends all others.

5. **Verse 9 - "Urbanus and Stachys"**

Little is known of these two. Paul only commends Urbanus as a fellow laborer and Stachys as another of Paul’s beloved friends.

6. **Verse 10 - "Apelles"** Ἀπελλῆς

Paul gives him an important designation – “one approved in Christ”

δόκιμος – “tested” a form of the verb δοκιμάζω

- A. Regarding our Christian life it is applied in many ways.
 - 1. It can refer to one who after being thoroughly tried and tested is proven faithful.

James 1:12 NAU - "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him."
 - 2. Paul also uses the word to describe one who has given due diligence to the matter of Biblical truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 NAU - "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

- B. The point is this. The Christian life is filled with duties and responsibilities in which we must be proven faithful. Likewise, the Christian life is filled with difficulties and trials through which we must also prove ourselves faithful.
- C. The important thing is that we are approved by Christ. His opinion is the only one that matters.

2 Corinthians 10:18 NAU - "For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends."

- D. Paul was always mindful of the danger of being proved disqualified or unapproved.
1 Corinthians 9:27 NAS - "but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified."
ἀδόκιμος
- E. Have you proven yourself dependable in the work of the Kingdom? Have you been diligent in your pursuit of the things of Christ?
How did Paul know that he was approved in Christ? Because his life was a testimony of one given over to serving Christ.

7. **Verses 10-11** - "Aristobulus and Narcissus" – Neither of these men are greeted personally but they are linked with their households.

- A. There is much said by paedobaptists about the baptism of households. We need to note the emphasis Paul give here regarding the household of Narcissus.
Romans 16:11 NAU - "Greet those of the *household* of Narcissus, who are in the Lord."
- B. The Philippian jailer is sometimes used as an example of household baptisms, but even here those baptized were those who believed.
Acts 16:33-34 NAU - "And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*.³⁴ And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

8. **Verse 12** – "Tryphaena and Tryphosa" – Two more women of distinction

- A. Paul uses the same word he used to describe the labors of Mary – wearisome toil
- B. Again, we find no indication that the ladies of the church toiled any less diligently than the men.

9. **Verse 12** - "Persis" – also a woman.

Again Paul uses the word to describe hard work, toilsome work.

With Persis Paul adds a comparative adjective – much or many – NASB: “hard”

He also uses the word “beloved” again.

- A. Some have pointed to the verb tenses here. With Tryphaena and Tryphosa the present tense is used implying ongoing action while with Persis the aorist is used implying a completed action. This could possibly point to Persis being very old and now perhaps unable to work as before, but her labors were not forgotten.

- B. If this is true this dear lady spent her days vigorously laboring as long as she was able. This is conjecture, of course
- C. As I pointed out last week, Paul had a pastor's heart. Paul had never been to this church and yet it is amazing how intimate he was with many of them – that he was able to stay in touch and maintain relationships even though hundreds of miles away in an age without telephones and without a reliable postal system. Do you have such love for the brethren?
10. **Verse 13 - "Rufus"**
- A. Paul describes him as a "choice man" in the NASB. This obscures the meaning of the word. It is ἐκλεκτός. Rufus was one of the elect as was his mother. This made Rufus Paul's brother in the faith. Paul says Rufus' mother was also a believer which means she was Paul's mother in the faith.
1. This magnifies the importance of the family of God. Listen to the words of our Lord.
Matthew 12:47-50 NAU - "Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." ⁴⁸ But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! ⁵⁰ "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.""
 2. We have a great family in Christ
Mark 10:29-30 NAU - ""Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, ³⁰ but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."
- B. At the crucifixion we read of one by the name of Simon of Cyrene. Mark describes him as the father of Rufus and Alexander.
Mark 15:21 NAU - " They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross."
- C. Why would Mark do this unless these men were well known to the church. Plus the fact that the Gospel of Mark was written particularly for the Church of Rome.
- D. This gives us every reason to suspect that this Rufus is one and the same whose father carried the cross of Christ.
11. **Verse 14 - "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them."**
We know nothing about this group except what Paul has told us here. They are simply names to us, but remember, they are not mere names to God.
12. **Verse 16 - "Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them."**
Again, there is little known here. Like with **Verse 14** these could be a group that met together in a home similar with those meeting with Priscilla and Aquila.

Conclusion:

1. The rich truth we are to glean from all of these names is the significance of people in the sight of God, particularly those who faithfully serve Him. These are people who lived over 2000 years ago.
 - A. How many millions lived their lives and died and were forgotten – and most are consigned to an endless torment in hell.
 - B. But these 24 names are still being spoken today—not forgotten but remembered for their faithfulness to Christ and His church.
2. How is your name being remembered? Are you among the faithful, those approved of God?
3. There is one more thing to take notice of with these names. Paul mentions one other thing about Rufus. Paul describes him as "a choice man in the Lord."

As I stated a moment ago, there is a much more descriptive way to translate this. KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV and most others: "chosen in the Lord" ἐκλεκτός - "elect in the Lord" – Paul is simply taking a moment to remind us of the source of faithfulness in all of these names.

We are called unto holiness, called unto faithfulness – called unto salvation.
4. To this we must close with the praise and glory of God.