

Sermon: “Paul’s Opinion of Women in the Church”

Text: [Romans 16 ESV](#)

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Introduction: I hope you have a sense of what we have covered together these past few months. Romans is not an easy epistle. The Apostle Peter had said:

II Peter 3:15-16 ESV ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

The Christian Church is made up of persons. In fact the only thing in community that does matter is persons: God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit and people who have God’s Spirit. Paul’s closing chapter gives us a personal look at the recipients of this sometimes hard to understand letter. Brunner says, “the impression which these salutations make is that of a great family on the one hand and of a working community on the other.”

Romans 16:1-15 ESV ¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca (*Priscilla*, [NIV](#)) and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

Sermon: When the Roll Is Called Down Here

by Fred Craddock

Preaching Today No. 5

I hope you will not feel guilty if your heart was not all aflutter during the reading of the text. It's not very interesting. It's a list of names, a list of strange names. I always tell my students in preaching class. "When you're preaching from biblical texts, avoid the lists. They're deadly. Don't preach from the lists." It seems that Paul is calling the roll. That's a strange thing in itself. I have never worshiped in a church in which anyone got up and called the roll. It could be very dull. Well, it could...it could be interesting in a way.

Calling the roll sometimes is not all that bad. Last December (*years ago*) I was summoned to Superior Court, DeKalb County, Georgia, to serve on the jury. On Monday morning at nine o'clock, 240 of us formed the pool out of which the juries for civil and criminal cases would be chosen. The deputy clerk of the Superior Court stood and called the roll. Two hundred forty names. She did not have them in alphabetical order. You had to listen. And while I was listening, I began to listen. There were two Bill Johnsons. One was black and one was white, and they were both Bill Johnson. There was a man named Clark, a Mr. Clark, who answered when the clerk read "Mrs. Clark." He said "Here."

And she looked up and said "Mrs. Clark."

And he said, "Here."

And she said "Mrs. Clark."

And he stood up and said, "Well, I thought the letter was for me, and I opened it."

And she said, "We summoned Mrs. Clark."

And he said "Well, I'm here. Can't I do it? She doesn't have any interest in this sort of thing."

And the clerk said, "Mr. Clark, how do you know? She doesn't even know she's been summoned."

This roll call was pretty good. There was a man there whose name I wrote phonetically because I couldn't spell it. His name was Zerfel Lashenstein. I remember it because they went over it five or six times, mispronouncing it. He insisted it be pronounced correctly and finally stood in a huff and said, "I see no reason why I should serve on a jury if a court can't pronounce my name."

The woman next to me said, “Lie-shen-stein. I wonder if he’s a Jew?”

I said, “Well, I don’t know. Could be. Does it matter?”

And she said, “I am German. My name is Zellar.”

And I said, “Well, it doesn’t matter. That was 60 years ago.”

And she said, “He and I could be seated next to each other in a jury.”

I said. “Well, you were probably just a child when all that happened years ago.”

And she said, “I was 10 years old. I visited Grandmother. She lived about four miles from Buchenwald. I smelled the odor.”

You know, a person could get interested in Paul’s calling the roll. Even if it’s no more than to say, I wonder how Paul knew all those people since he had never been to the church?” I wonder if back then you could buy mailing lists? After all, he wants to raise money in Rome for His Spanish mission, and he is politically wise.

He says, “Tell this one hello and that one hello.” Some scholars think this doesn’t even belong in Romans. He’s never been to Rome. But I could get interested in the roll call because it gives a kind of sociological profile of the membership of the church.

Now, I don’t expect you to remember, but in the list there is a husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla. There’s a man and his mother, Rufus and his mother. There is a brother and sister, Nereus and his sister. There are brothers, Andronicus and Junias. There are sisters, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. There is and old man Epaenetus. Isn’t that an interesting profile of the church? There is a single woman, Mary. There’s a single man, Herodian. Not a lot of nuclear family there at all, except as Christ has called them together. It’s an interesting list, sort of...

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The Apostle Paul does not deserve the reputation that some have tried to give him that he thinks:

- 1. women are second-class citizens**
- 2. women should be seen but not heard**

In honor of Christian women and also to finish our agenda in **Romans**, I would like to look this morning at the six women mentioned by name and also those anonymous women in this closing chapter of Romans. The original salutations certainly were more meaningful to the original audience than for us. They had loved each other; they had served the Lord together. We do not have the same history nor any common experiences with the author or that 1st century audience, but let's try to regain some of the flavor of these women who were in the Church working in concert with the Apostle Paul.

PHOEBE (verse 1)

Many scholars including the translators of the RSV and various commentators have tried to render the word **διακονον** - deaconess. There is no need to force that meaning of a word that everywhere else in the same letter is translated "servant" referring to government authorities twice in **Romans 13:4**, and to Christ himself in **Romans 15:8**. It seems arbitrary here to force the translation *deaconess*, especially in light of the absence of such an office in Scripture. Nevertheless, and not to diminish her importance, Phoebe was a trusted Christian sister to Paul. He wrote her a letter of commendation to introduce her to those in Rome who would receive this letter that would become HOLY WRIT. Phoebe would be the bearer of Paul's letter.

Paul said:

1. Welcome Her (in the Lord). This is the special kind of welcome only found in Christian homes because of the common bond found in Jesus Christ.
2. Help Her!

WHY? Because she had been a helper to many others as well as the Apostle himself. It is thought that Phoebe might have been a well-to-do business woman who was on her way to Rome to conduct business. The Greek word, **προστατες**, translated helper, was a word that meant a legal representative or wealthy *patron* (ESV). She would literally carry the word of God to others.

PRISCA or PRISCILLA (verses 3-5a)

Priscilla and Aquila are a very important husband and wife team in the N.T. They are always mentioned together in the N.T. They were forced to leave Rome after an edict issued by Claudius about 52 A.D. which banished all Jews (**Acts 18:2**). They then moved to Corinth. They were tentmakers by trade, and Paul lived with them in their home.

It takes a special person to be able to live with a non-family member. Family is sometimes difficult enough. Have you ever moved in with your parents or in-laws?

When Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla followed him (**Acts 18:18**). e.g. Chuck and Nancy Durham followed their minister from Troy, Ohio to Florida (What a Sacrifice for the Gospel!)

It was **Aquila and Priscilla** who took into their home, Apollos, a brilliant scholar and orator who needed further instruction in the Christian faith (**Acts 18: 24-26**). He then went on to encourage others. You see how a kindness ripples out from its origin? When you disciple people who disciple people, etc.

We hear later the Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian Church from the home of guess who? (**I Corinthians 16:19**). This was before church buildings. Priscilla and Aquila later returned to Rome as it is recorded here, AND again they have a group of Christians meeting in their home (a house church).

Lastly, then in **II Timothy 4:19**, they are found back in Ephesus again being greeted in a letter by Paul. Barclay puts it this way, “Every home should be a Church, for a Church is a place where Jesus dwells.”

Illus. On Father’s Day in Waverly, NY (1985) -- Ed, the minister of a Church of God (Anderson) congregation, took me to O’Briens (very nice restaurant). He told me no one should be alone on Father’s Day.”

In the N.T. four of the six times that Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, her name is first - BEFORE her husband’s. It could be she was converted before Aquila, or that she was of noble birth, or even that she was the stronger as a teacher and a Christian. We do not know. They are always listed together as well it should be. We can be sure of one thing. There were many people who owed their souls either directly or indirectly to Priscilla and her husband. They had literally risked their lives for Paul and thus the cause of Christ. Out of all this the most important aspect of their lives was that they were counted as co-workers with the apostle Paul. That’s pretty good company.

MARY (verse 6) “who worked very hard for you (i.e., the Church at Rome).”

JUNIA(S) (verse 7)

Junias is more than likely a woman (Chrysostom, col. 670). She is called Paul’s kinsmen (relative in the NIV). This probably meant “fellow Jew.” She had been imprisoned for her faith. She with Andronicus were Christians before Paul.

Junia was a little like a charter member. With this longevity in the faith came a great deal of respect, but all these women had earned theirs to be mentioned by the Apostle. The fact they were Christians before Paul indicates a direct link which may have went back to the time of Stephen and the Church at Jerusalem.

Junia is described in the NIV as an apostle (literally one sent out, or representative). This would obviously be different from the original 12 apostles, and different from Paul's apostleship. The ESV renders this differently (maybe even more accurately): "They are well known to the apostles,"

TRYPHENA and TRYPHOSA (verse 12a)

Three times in this listing of women Paul uses the Greek word **κοπιων** which literally means to work to the point of exhaustion. It is a little play on words because Tryphena's name has the meaning of softness, daintiness, and delicacy; and Tryphosa's, live softly, luxuriously, fare sumptuously according to Cranfield.

PERSIS (verse 12b) literally means Persian woman and was probably a freed woman. Persis is warmly regarded as beloved and as a hard worker in the Lord.

The mother of Rufus (verse 13)

She was like a mother to Paul. Maybe Paul went there when he felt there was no one who cared. We have all emotionally been there. It is a great feeling to know there is a place to which you can go **AND BE ACCEPTED AND LOVED**. Mark like Paul also wrote to a Roman audience. In **Mark 15:21** we read of Simon a Cyrenian who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha. This Simon is said to be the father of Alexander and Rufus. Questions which may come to mind are:

1. Was Simon a part of the men from Cyrene connected with the early proclamation of the gospel in Antioch (**Acts 11:20**)?
2. Were Rufus and Alexander and their mother there as well?
3. Was the Alexander mentioned in **Acts 19**, who stood in front of an angry mob, also a part of this family? His mother must have been proud of her husband and sons. Her house was open to nurture the Apostle as well.

The sister of Nereus (verse 15)

In 95 A.D. two very important people in Rome were condemned for being Christians. Their names were Flavius Clemens who was a consul in Rome (highest possible position) and his wife Domatilla. She was of royal blood and granddaughter of Vespasian and a niece to Domitian. Domatilla's two sons were in line to the throne. Flavius and Domatilla had a slave named Nereus. It is possible that this slave had a part to play in their becoming Christians.

Women have always played an important role within the Church. Today, there is still a need for godly, hard-working women in the Lord. There are many avenues of service open to women in the contemporary Church. I invite you to become involved in this Body of believers if you are not already. For those who are working to the point of exhaustion, please ask for help - but never give up. We appreciate all the mothers, and the influence they have had on our collective lives. For the women who are not mothers for whatever reasons, I would encourage you to be like the mother of Rufus and be like a mother to others who serve God.

Romans 16:16-27 ESV ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. ¹⁹ For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good - and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

²¹ Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. ²² I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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