

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

**PAUL'S GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE HELP**

Romans 16:1-15

September 16, 2018

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The title of my message today is "Paul's Gratitude For All The Help" and I'll be preaching from Romans 16:1-15.

I have two points to my message today and here they are:

- Paul recognized his many helpers on the Lord's work
- Paul recognized the diversity of helpers

**INTRODUCTION:** If you merely look at Romans 16 at a glance, you'll see a list of names. If you've been keeping up with our study, then you may have looked ahead and wondered how a sermon could come out of a list of names. I must say I wondered that as well!

Then it hit me. Romans is very similar to the book of Acts in that we have glimpses of the early church. Many things the two books deal with could be summed up in "What to do when" statements. The coming together of people with different backgrounds all because of Christ was a wonderful thing. It was a miracle of God indeed, but it didn't come without some confusion and effort. People's minds had to be opened like they had never been opened before.

After writing such an incredible letter, before Paul closed out, he addressed some people directly. All people were significant to Paul. Some of them we know about, some of them we don't. Listen and gain from the preaching of the scripture today.

**PAUL RECOGNIZED HIS MANY HELPERS IN THE LORD'S WORK**

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:1-2

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. <sup>2</sup> I ask*

*you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.*

**EXPLANATION:** It was 750 miles from Cenchreae to Rome. Since Paul was introducing Phoebe to the church in Rome, she must have been a new arrival. It is possible she is the one who delivered Paul's letter to them.

Paul says she was a benefactor of many people. The English word benefactor comes from the New Testament Greek word "prostasis" which means protecting and caring for people and aiding them with one's own resources. This indicates that Phoebe had material wealth. Paul called her a deacon, which means servant.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:3-4

*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul knew Priscilla and Aquila, the husband and wife team, from his time in Corinth. They were from Rome and would have told him about what was going on in Rome. Apparently, they had moved back to Rome and had a church in their home.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:5-7

*Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*

We believe Epenetus was saved in Ephesus which was the first congregation in that area. Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written to them.

*Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. - We know nothing more about his particular Mary.*

*<sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*

**EXPLANATION:** Both of these people have Greek names, but Paul called them Jews. Somewhere in Paul's travels, he found himself in jail with these two. Now they were in Rome.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:8-10

*Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.* - It is believed he was martyred for his faith.

<sup>9</sup> *Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.*

Nothing really is known about them other than mere speculation. But Paul included them in this list of people, so they were known to the people in Rome.

<sup>10</sup> *Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test.*

There are several people in early church history with this name Apelles but nothing more is known about this particular one.

*Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.*

**EXPLANATION:** The word “household” here indicates a wealthy man with servants. Some have connected him as a grandson of King Herod and the brother of Herod Agrippa. If so, that would be very interesting because as you know King Herod tried to have Jesus killed as a baby and many years later Paul preached a persuasive message to Agrippa who is famous for telling Paul “you almost persuaded me to become a Christian.” And now they had a relative as a Jesus follower.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:11-15

*Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.* - Since his name has both Greek and Roman origins and since Paul calls him “my fellow Jew,” we believe he was a Hellenistic Jew. We know from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts that the Hellenistic people were unfriendly toward Jesus and his followers. Here we have one of them who became a Jesus follower.

*Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.* - Again, the word “household” which probably meant a wealthy person who had servants. Nothing more is known about him.

<sup>12</sup> *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.* - Nothing more is known about any of these three.

<sup>13</sup> *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.* - This is very interesting. Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15:21 along with his father Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.* - We know nothing about them.

<sup>15</sup> *Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.*

**EXPLANATION:** From verse 15 we know a little bit about two people: Philologus literally means “talkative.” This could have been a code name for someone who had some political importance, but Paul didn’t want to expose him to the authorities. “Tell Big Talker I said hi.”

Nereus – Greek, and a member of the Roman army, who was martyred with his companion Achilleus because they refused to execute Christians.

Here, Paul acknowledges those who came to his mind, who in some way had contributed to the work of sharing the Gospel of Christ. All these people Paul knew in some way, even though he had never been to Rome. Some believe that this section of scripture is misplaced and should be in Ephesians, but I disagree for several reasons which we could talk about at another time.

How is it that Paul knew these people even though he’d never been to Rome? Here’s the answer: some of them he’d met in his travels, others he may have learned about from Priscilla and Aquilla, but here’s what’s interesting: They all came together in Rome to form a church. The main reason people relocate is economics. And at this time, Rome was growing like crazy. Some of the people in the church at Rome were native; some were transplants. Paul acknowledged those who helped him and those who helped spread the message.

**ILLUSTRATION:** It’s easy to take credit for what others have done. We’ve all seen it happen, haven’t we? Someone does all the work, but someone else takes all the credit. Last week, I spoke with a woman who is a hard worker at her job. She works for a lazy boss, who is more than happy to take all the credit for her work.

I've seen pastors take such credit as well, going so far as to say, "Nothing really happened before I got here." I was with a pastor who said that one time and I kept quiet, but I thought *how arrogant!*

**APPLICATION:** It's easy to take credit for what others have done. When someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ, it's the result of many people working together for a long time for the cause of Christ. The baptisms we saw today are the result of people around the world, literally, working together for the cause of Christ. Let's thank others for their contributions and never think we are a one-person army for God. Elijah felt like that one time, and God reminded him there were many others who had not bowed down to Baal.

## **PAUL RECOGNIZED THE DIVERSITY OF HELPERS**

Let's look at this list.

Phoebe – Greek

Priscilla and Aquilla – Roman

Epenetus – Greek

Mary – Hebrew - Jewish

Andronicus – Greek, but called a Jew by Paul

Junia – Roman, but called a Jew by Paul

Ampliatius – Roman

Urbanus – Roman

Stachys – Greek

Apelles – Greek

Aristobulus – Greek

Herodion – Both Greek and Roman origins, called Paul's fellow Jew

Narcissus – Greek

Tryphena – Greek

Tryphosa – Greek

Persis – Greek

Rufus – Roman

A-syn'-critus – Greek

Phlegon – Greek

Hermes – Greek

Patrobus – unknown  
Hermas – Greek  
Philologus – Greek  
Julia – Roman  
Nereus – Greek  
Olympas – Greek

If I counted correctly:

17 people with Greek names, some of whom were Jews

7 Romans

1 Hebrew name who was a Jew

1 named with a mixed background

1 name with an unknown origin

**EXPLANATION:** You may wonder why this is important. Before I shared this information, you probably just saw it as a list of names. As we know, Paul was quite a wordsmith. He didn't really speak in nuance. Paul was a bold and plain speaker. Sometimes he tended to over-explain. What we know for sure is that Paul didn't write carelessly. He included all these names for a reason. He wanted the readers to know he valued everyone and didn't care about their roots.

He included Roman names, Greek names, and Jewish names on purpose. Some of the names are from Roman and Greek mythology. Think of it. Hermes' parents thought so much of the Greek god Hermes they named their son after him. In Greek mythology, Hermes was known as the messenger of the gods. Having become a Christian, the man named after the Greek god was a messenger of Jesus Christ.

Paul included all these names for a reason. It was a sign to all who would read Romans that when Jesus comes into a person's life, old beliefs die.

Paul included people who were well-known and wealthy and people no one knew. He did it on purpose. It was a sign to all who read Romans that everyone mattered to him. Status held no special importance.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Many of you remember Pastor Raouf Ghattas the retired missionary who served on our staff for a year before his sudden death. Raouf had a

great sense of humor. He called Bill's office the museum and called Bill the keeper of the museum. He had a lot of chivalry and the women on staff liked him. But Raouf had a serious side as well. He was bound and determined to share the love of Christ with Muslim people. He told of a man named Mohammed who became a Christian and later a pastor. Pastor Mohammed sounded kind of awkward and Raouf asked him if he had considered changing his name. "No," said Pastor Mohammad, "because my name is my testimony."

**CONCLUSION:** Hermes the Christian - his testimony was in his name.  
Olympus the Christian - her testimony was in her name.

Paul addressed people by their diversity of names because he wanted everyone to know he loved them like Christ loved them, that they were one in Christ regardless of their past beliefs or the beliefs of their parents, regardless of their past hate for one another. None of that mattered. What mattered was their present fellowship and sharing the message with all people.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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