

44. Learning to Build Relationships With One Another

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to other Christians through prayer. We saw that Paul gave some specific requests as he asked the Christians in Rome to pray for him. We saw that God answered each of those prayer requests. One of those requests was answered in a different way than Paul might have expected but it showed that the Lord will answer according to His will as we pray for others. In our topic today, we want to show our children how to build healthy relationships with other Christians.

In Romans 16:1-2, we read, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” Phoebe was the woman who delivered this letter to the church in Rome for Paul. She was from the church in Cenchrea, which was a port city located very close to the city of Corinth. The word that is translated “commend” means *to approve or to put together*. It is used in 2 Corinthians 10:18 where we read, “For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.” In this verse, we see that there is a difference between a person who approves of himself and a person who is approved by the Lord or another person. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to know that he approved of Phoebe and viewed her as a sister in the Lord. This was a real encouragement to the Christians in Rome to build a good relationship with her.

We also see that Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. The word that is translated “servant” is the word from which we get the word “deacon or deaconess”. It means a person who carries out the instructions of another. Here, she was carrying out the instructions of Paul by taking this letter to the church in Rome. As a result, Paul encouraged the church to accept her in a manner worthy of saints. She was apparently going to Rome to take care of some kind of business so Paul encouraged the Christians to provide any help possible for her. Paul also said that she had helped many other Christians including Paul. Here, we see that Paul helped Phoebe to build a good relationship with the Christians in the church at Rome by giving her a good introduction.

Romans 16:3-6 says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us.” The first couple to whom Paul sent greetings in the church at Rome was Aquila and Priscilla. They had helped him establish the churches in Corinth and in Ephesus. Here, Paul tells how they had given of themselves to help Paul in his ministry. He said that they had risked their own necks for the sake of Paul. Paul said that he personally thanked God for this couple. In addition, he said that their ministry caused many other churches of the Gentiles to give thanks for them.

Since Paul knew that one of the congregations of the church in Rome met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, he also sent greetings to that group of Christians. In the early church, all of the churches met in homes or other places because the early churches had no buildings. We can show our children the value of hospitality today by hosting different groups of the church in our home

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so they learn how to use their homes for ministry. Paul sent greetings to Epaenetus because he was the first person that Paul led to Christ in Achaia (some manuscripts say Asia, which is the western part of what is presently the country of Turkey). Paul also sent greetings to Mary who had worked to the point of exhaustion to serve the churches. Here, we see that Paul was helping to build relationships between various Christians in Roman by sharing with the other Christians how the Lord had used these Christians to help others.

Romans 16:7-10 says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus.” Next we are introduced to Andronicus and Junia. Since Junia can be the name of a woman, this may have been a husband and a wife. They were countrymen of Paul. The word that is translated “countrymen” can mean *a relative or someone from the same country*. Acts 10:24 says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” In this verse, we see that the word is translated “relatives”. We also see two other things about this couple. At some place in his ministry, they had been in prison with Paul. Their ministry was also well-known and appreciated by the apostles so they had probably been Christians in Jerusalem, possibly before Paul had even become a Christian.

Amplias is the next person mentioned. We do not know much about this person. However, this was a common name among the slaves of Caesar at that time. As a result, it is possible that he would be included among those who were mentioned several years later by Paul in Philippians 4:22 where we read, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.” Here, we see that there was a group of Christians among those who were the household servants of Caesar. Since several of his servants had the name of Amplias, that is why we say that this may have been a servant of Caesar.

The next four names, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, and Aristobulus, are only mentioned in these verses so we know only what is mentioned in these verses. Paul said that Urbanus had been their helper. As a result, this was a person that had been a fellow worker with Paul in one of the cities where he had ministered, as this is the same word that was used in verse three to describe Aquila and Priscilla. In fact, each place Paul used this word it described people who had ministered with Paul. Stachys was a person that Paul greatly loved although we do not know where or how Paul knew him. Apelles is described as one who is approved. This meant that a person was pleasing and was also used to speak about coins that were genuine so it probably talked about the fact that he was a man of high character. This greeting to Aristobulus was to his household so it is possible that his family and servants were Christians but he had not yet become a Christian.

Romans 16:11-16 says, “Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints

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who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” The same word is used to describe Herodion that was used to describe Andronicus and Junia so Herodion was either a relative of Paul or someone from his country. We also see that Paul sent greetings to the household of Narcissus. Some people believe that Narcissus may have been the secretary of the emperor.

Tryphena and Tryphosa are both female names. Their names mean “delicate” and “dainty”, so it is possible that they were sisters or even twin sisters. Wherever Paul had met them, they had worked hard for the Lord. The same is also true of another woman by the name of Persis who had also worked hard in the Lord.

Rufus is mentioned both here and in Mark 15:21 which says, “Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.” In Mark, we see that Rufus is the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Christ. Since Mark wrote the book of Mark from Rome, people generally agree that Mark and Paul wrote about the same person. If so, Simon and his family probably became followers of Christ after Simon was forced to carry the cross for Christ. Rufus is also called chosen in the Lord and may have been a Christian who was well known for his service for the Lord. At some time in Paul’s travels, the mother of Rufus had cared for Paul like a mother.

We also have two groups of names. The first group is Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. The second group is Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Since these groups are mentioned as groups, it is probable that these refer to the leaders of two of the other congregations that were in the city of Rome. Since verse five mentioned the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, this would indicate that Paul knew the leaders of at least three of the congregations in the city of Rome. This probably meant that Paul took time to listen and learn every time that he met a Christian that had come from Rome because of his love for people that he had led to Christ.

Paul encourages the Christians in Rome to greet one another with a holy kiss. Paul closes four of his letters by encouraging the Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss. Peter closed I Peter by encouraging the Christians to greet one another with a kiss of love. As a result, we see that this was a common form of greeting among the early Christians. The word that is translated “holy” is translated “holy” 161 times and “saint” or “saints” 61 times out of the 229 times that the word is used. Here, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to build godly relationships with one another and with other Christians that are characterized by acceptance, holiness and godly love. The Lord blesses such relationships. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to build such relationships with one another.