

A GLIMPSE OF LIFE IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

Romans 16:1-27

Introduction: What does a healthy church look like?

I. The Early Church Was Deeply Relational (v.1-16, 21-23)

- A. Paul is not just writing a doctrinal thesis; he is writing to people he knows and loves
 - o 26 different names are mentioned
 - o Paul speaks of how they loved him, and how they love and serve one another
 - o There is an “inter-connectivity” here that is remarkable. These people are really sharing their lives together!
- B. Examples of Relational Interactions
 - o Phoebe was a “patron” of Paul (v.2)
 - o Prisca and Aquila “risked their necks” for Paul (v.4)
 - o Paul calls numerous people “my beloved” (v.5, 8, 9, 12)
 - o Mother of Rufus was “a mother to me” (v.13)

****Key Question:** How’s your relational connectivity to the believers around you? Are you really involved in their lives? If Paul wrote a letter to your church, would he mention your name?

II. The Early Church Was Ministry-Minded (v.1-16, 21-23)

- A. Ministry was done by ordinary lay people, not professionals!
 - o Notice that there is an army of people doing ministry, and none of them are professionally trained or ordained.
 - o The list represents a variety of social classes
 - Many were slaves or freedman; e.g., Ampliatus (v.8), Urbanus (v.9)
 - Priscilla and Aquila, and Phoebe were likely wealthy
 - “Family of Aristobulus” (v.10) and “Family of Narcissus” are likely wealthy aristocratic families where some members have converted, but not the heads of the household.

* Aristobulus may have been the brother of Herod Agrippa I

* Narcissus may have been a servant of Emperor Claudius

- o Notice also how many of the people on this list were women
 - Examples: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, mother of Rufus, Julia, sister of Nereus
 - Women played a tremendously important role in the ministry of Jesus, Paul, and the early church

B. What kind of ministry were these people doing?

- o Travelling (v.2-4), Witnessing (v.5, 10-11, 13), Suffering (v.4, 7), Giving financially (v.2)
- o Hosting churches, and people (v.5, 23)
- o Generally, Paul commends those who “worked hard” (v.6, 12) or were “workers” (v. 9, 12, 21)

****Key Question:** Are you busy using your gifts and doing ministry in your local church? If Paul wrote a letter to your church, would he mention your name?

III. The Early Church was Doctrinally Careful (v.17-20)

A. The Danger of False Teachers

- o Paul knows false teachers are inevitable and warns the Romans to be on their guard
- o They “cause divisions and create obstacles” (v.17)

B. The Method of False Teachers

- o They look like servants of Christ, but they really serve their appetites (v.18)
- o They prey on the “naïve” by “smooth talk and flattery”

C. Response to False Teachers

- o “Avoid them” (v.17)—meaning do not listen to them, or allow others to do so
- o Be confident that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (v.20)

IV. The Early Church was Gospel-Centered (v.25-27)

A. Paul’s repeats the Gospel themes in the opening of Romans

- o Notice Paul uses word “gospel”
- o Paul says Gospel was in OT prophets

- o Paul says Gospel is going to the “the nations”
 - o Paul says purpose is “obedience of faith”
- B. What does it mean to be Gospel-Centered?
- o To be focused first and primarily on the sufficiency and greatness of what God has *already* done (and then let our good works flow out as a response)
 - o A work-centered person is focused first and primarily on what they have to do, and the finished work of Christ is often an afterthought.

Discussion Groups

1. In what ways can you be more relationally connected to the body of Christ? Have you found yourself isolated or operating independently?

2. In what ways can you serve and use your gifts within your church? What has kept you from doing that up to this point?

3. As you think about your life, ministry, and worship, do you think it is “Gospel-Centered” or works-centered?
