

Persons & Personalities, Part 2

Romans 16:1-16 on April 28, 2024

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Please read Romans 16:1-16 before going further in this transcript.

If today's Scripture reading sounds familiar, that's because this is our 2nd Sunday taking a look at the list of people whom Paul greeted in the Roman Church.¹ This is the last week we'll do this, before moving on, but today we're going to take one more peek into the faith stories that lie behind these names. New Testament scholar Douglas Moo makes a helpful observation about names: "Names in the ancient world were highly significant. People in our culture often choose names simply because they sound good or remind the person of a movie star or athlete. But in Paul's culture, the names that people were given usually said something about their origin, profession, and/or social class."² My *Study Bible* adds the following note: "The 26 names in these verses reveal that the Roman Christian community was very diverse, with men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and people from both the upper and lower classes."³ Let's keep this in mind as we move through the text this morning. As we continue through this list of names today, we're going to discover a broad diversity within the gathered body of believers in the early church. And as we consider their diversity, we'll see how the gospel made a powerful impact in each one of their individual faith stories.

In the early church...

1) As the gospel united them, they embraced social diversity. There's something in Romans 16 that I didn't fully appreciate, until someone in our Life Group pointed it out last week.⁴ We find phrases like "in Christ" and "in the Lord" all throughout this list:

- "in the Lord" appears in verses 2,8,11,12(2x),13
- "in Christ" appears in verses 3,7,9
- "to Christ" appears in verses 5,10
- "of Christ" appears in verse 16, "ALL the churches of Christ."

¹ Those of us who aren't grammar geeks, may wonder how we're supposed to know how to pronounce some of these names? Well, let me suggest a few Bible name pronunciation hacks: 1. Keep in mind, most of us have no clue how they're pronounced! (So, just say them with confidence and keep moving. People will assume you're brilliant!) 2. Listen to them on your audio Bible. (Let the paid professionals do the work for you.) 3. Google them. (There are tons of pronunciation helps online, and most of them are really quite good.) And, if all else fails, and you really want to get down to business, then... 4. Buy a book like, "That's Easy for You to Say." (This is a quick guide to pronouncing Bible names. It even comes with an audio CD, or the electronic version has audio links for each name.) By the way, one thing you'll come to realize fairly early on, is that even these professional-grade resources, often have multiple pronunciation options for many names. Much like today, different geographical regions and people groups, often pronounce words differently. Or, as I like to say, "they often put the emPHAsis on the wrong SYLLable!"

² He goes on, "...Several...are Jewish names.... But most are names that would have been given to gentiles – for example, Hermes and Olympas, which refer to Greek mythology (vv. 14,15)." Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 2nd Ed., Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, p. 195.

³ NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2321 footnote on Romans 16:3-16.

⁴ My thanks to Mishel Carlson for noting this at our Tuesday night Life Group!

So 12 different times in these 16 verses we find references to what truly binds these believers together. It's not so much about meeting together in the same city, as it is about meeting together in the same name. They were all "in Christ" together. I appreciate how New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner says it: "The greetings express the solidarity and affection among those who belong to the Lord. ... Greetings are not merely secular 'hellos' but are rooted in the new life of Christ."⁵ So the people whom Paul is greeting by name are "in Christ" together, and he's writing these 16 chapters to them, to highlight and articulate the power and beauty of the gospel message. What united them into a church body, was the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Christ alone! Not only had the gospel made them into a church, but it had united them as one people, even though they were an incredibly socially diverse group of people. The gospel empowered, and called, and enabled them to embrace the social diversity in their midst. The early church was composed of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, white collar and blue collar.^{6 7} It was composed of people from all different kinds of various cultural backgrounds, including... *slave* and free. Let me show you what I mean.

The early church was a multi-ethnic church. This list in Romans 16 is composed of both Jews and Gentiles; however, ethnic diversity wasn't the only diversity that they embraced. We also find something perhaps even more remarkable: gospel unity in the midst of broad social diversity. In other words, unity among different classes of people. What isn't immediately apparent to us as modern-day readers, is that a good portion of these 26 names, were either current or former slaves. We can deduce this from a number of factors, one of which is the names themselves. You see, certain names in this list indicate that they were very likely slaves. In fact, it could be that as many as 18 of the 26 names that Paul greeted, came from some kind of a slave background (that's as much as 70% of his list!).⁸ Just let that sink in for a minute....

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 764.

⁶ We talked about this last week, but once again, "Women were prominent in the Roman church, not just as attenders but as workers as well. 10 of the 27 Christians whom Paul greets are women (more than one-third). Six of them...are specifically commended for their labor in the Lord. ...the early church:..fostered an open atmosphere in which women participated alongside men. This was unusual in the ancient world." Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, p. 195.

⁷ "Several passages in Romans suggest... that most of the Roman Christians were Gentiles when Paul wrote... The Gentile element in the Roman church received a significant boost in AD 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome (see Acts 18:2). Jewish Christians would have been included in this eviction order, so the Christian movement would have become almost entirely Gentile overnight. By the time Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome, however, Jews had been allowed back into the city. Thus, Paul's audience included Jewish Christians such as Priscilla and Aquila (16:3-5)." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2288.

⁸ 18 potential slaves or freemen listed in Romans 16: Ampliatius, Apelles, Asyncritus, Hermas, Hermes, Herodion, Julia, Junia, Nereus, Olympas, Patrobas, Persis, Philologus, Phlegon, Stachys, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Urbanus, plus the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus. Here is where I get this list >>> One Bible commentator suggests that the following names in this list were all probably slaves: Nereus, Hermes, Persis, Herodian, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Junia, Julia, and Ampliatius. (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 763.) My *Study Bible* notes that "Urbanus, Stachys, and Apelles [were all also] common slave names found in the imperial household." (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1917 footnote on Romans 16:8-10.) It also notes that all of the people in verses 14-15 were either slaves or freedmen in the Roman Church." (*NIV Study Bible*,

My *Study Bible* notes that all of the names listed in verses 14-15 were likely either slaves or freedmen (meaning emancipated slaves): So this includes Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas⁹ as well as Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas.¹⁰ All of them likely came from a slave background. Furthermore, in verses 10-11, the households of Aristobulus¹¹ and Narcissus are likely referring to the slaves who lived in these households. And quite a few of the other names listed throughout these 16 verses, also indicate the likelihood of them being current or former slaves.

Now, whether or not all 18 of these potential names actually came from a slave background, or whether this list in Romans 16 is an accurate representation of the norm, we can't be sure. But, we can be sure that these names made up at least some portion of the early church, and Paul didn't hesitate to greet them warmly and to associate himself with each one of them. The early church embraced social diversity.

This social diversity does raise some immediate concerns for us though, so it's important that we make a clear distinction between slavery in the 1st century, and the slavery in our own more recent American history. Two years ago Matt Graf, the Chaplain from Oak Hills Christian College, preached a sermon at E-Free on the book of Philemon.¹² Philemon is a short letter that Paul wrote concerning a runaway slave named Onesimus; if you want to learn more, check out the link on our website to Matt's sermon. Matt pointed out 4 key distinctives of 1st century slavery:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1917 footnote on Romans 16:14-15.) These 18 aren't even counting the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus which refer to slave households. "many of these gentiles seem to have been freedmen, a social class made up of people who had been released from slavery. And some were slaves still. To belong to the 'household' of a certain person meant to be a slave of that person. Thus, those belonging to the households of Aristobulus (v. 10) and Narcissus (v. 11) were slaves." (Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, p. 195.)

⁹ Asyncritus = "uh SIN krih thus" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 31.)

Phlegon = "FLEE gahn" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 131.)

Hermes = "HUHR meez" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 81.)

Patrobas = "PAT roh buhs" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 128.)

Hermas = "HUHR muhs" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 81.)

¹⁰ Philologus = "fih LAHL oh guhs" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 130.)

Nereus = "NEE roos" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 122.)

¹¹ Aristobulus = "uh riss toh BYOO luhs" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 28.)

¹² Find Matt's sermon here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/the-gospel-cant-stay-inside/>

- 1) **1st century slavery didn't have the same racial overtones.**
(In other words, back then, slaves came from a variety of ethnicities.)
- 2) **Some people intentionally sold themselves into slavery in order to make their lives better.**¹³ (So, for some, but certainly not all, slavery was actually an opportunity to advance themselves.)
- 3) **Slaves were given opportunities for education, to learn to read and write, to learn skills and trades, and so on.** One commentary explains it this way: "While an individual was a slave, he was in most respects equal to his freeborn counterpart in the Graeco-Roman world, and in some respects, he had an advantage. ...Many had a considerable amount of money at their disposal and had rights to wife and family. ...The living conditions of many slaves were better than those of free men who often slept in the streets of the city or lived in very cheap rooms. ...the slaves lived within the confines of their master's house. ...In fact, in times of economic hardship, it was the slave, and not the free [person], who was guaranteed the necessities of life for himself and his family."¹⁴
- 4) **Many slaves earned their freedom, or had it granted to them, after a certain period of time.**^{15 16} (In fact, history records that a number of former slaves went on to become successful businessmen and businesswomen. Some of them even became wealthier than their former owners.¹⁷ And many of them went on to become well-respected Roman citizens.¹⁸)

Now, none of these factors necessarily negates our concern with the evils of enslaving someone, who is made in God's image, against their will. However, these four distinctives do give us a clearer sense of the context in which the New Testament was written. And they help us understand how some believers could own slaves. The fact is, there are a lot of verses in the New Testament that give instructions both to slaves and to slave owners. And, it's no wonder why, since slavery was so prevalent during this time in history. It's impact was felt all throughout the Roman empire, including in and around the churches.

¹³ The Old Testament slavery of Joseph comes to mind; he eventually rose to such prominence that he was 2nd only to Pharaoh.

¹⁴ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z*, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, pp. 459-460.

¹⁵ "evidence of various kinds indicates that the Romans freed slaves in great numbers. ...Cicero...made the point that a worthy slave could expect his freedom in about seven years, a figure which coincides remarkably with the Old Testament requirement." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z*, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, pp. 458-459.

¹⁶ "When a master freed his slave, he frequently established his freedman in a business and the master became a shareholder in it. Usually the slave had learned his trade as an apprentice in the master's household." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z*, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 459.

¹⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z*, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 459.

¹⁸ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z*, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 458 top right.

1 Timothy 1:9-11 declares that enslaving people, against their will, is evil, “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious ...for slave traders¹⁹ [*also translated kidnappers*] and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel....” The gospel declares that the enslavement of people against their will is contrary to sound doctrine. Even so, the early church didn’t resist the institution of slavery in and of itself. Instead, it took a gospel approach to slavery.

In 1 Corinthians 7:21-22 Paul gives this instruction, “Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave.” So as important as it is for us to gain our freedom, the gospel offers us a much greater freedom. Whether we are slave or free, faith in Jesus Christ transforms our reality, in renewing and lifechanging ways.

Let me be clear, I apologize if anything I’m saying today is offensive or hurtful to those of us who have a difficult background with slavery. My intention today is not to pour salt in any wounds, but rather to simply help us better understand some of the dynamics of slavery in the 1st century. And, to better understand how the gospel restores the dignity, and beauty, of each person who is made in God’s image. Galatians 3:26-29 gives diverse people a wonderful assurance, “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Even with our modern-day abhorrence of slavery keenly in mind, verses like these remind us that many slaves put their trust in Jesus Christ, and they actively served in their local church right alongside everyone else. With this in mind, let’s consider Romans 16:8-10, “Greet Ampliatus²⁰, my dear friend in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus²¹, our co-worker in Christ, and my

¹⁹ ἀνδραποδιστής = “one who acquires persons for use by others, slave-dealer, kidnapper” 1 Timothy 1:10 (here perhaps with the meaning ‘procurer.’) (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 76.)

²⁰ *Ampliatus* = “am plih AY thus” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 24.) See https://www.google.com/search?q=Pronounce+Ampliatus&rlz=#kpvalbx=_mQEgZqiNK_2eptQP7vmTIA_53

²¹ *Urbanus* = “uhr BAY nuhs” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 160.)

dear friend Stachys.²² 10 Greet Apelles²³, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test....” These four people were likely either slaves or former slaves. Ampliatus was Paul’s dear friend in the Lord. Urbanus is the only man in Paul’s list who’s referred to as a “co-worker in Christ,” “which probably means that he functioned as an itinerant missionary.”²⁴ Stachys was yet another of Paul’s dear friends.

Apelles is noted for his fidelity to Christ which has stood the test.²⁵ Once again, there seems to be a story behind this, but we can only speculate as to what that story might be. We do know that Apelles was a common slave name. And in some way, he had been tested, and that test revealed a strength of character in him that was worth noting, so the Apostle Paul commends him for it publicly.²⁶ To be clear, we’re speculating a bit here, but IF Apelles was indeed a slave, this gives us a deeper understanding of the immense compliment that Paul pays him in verse 10. As a slave, Apelles was a man whose fidelity to Christ stood the test; his Christian faith held strong, even in the midst of the strains of slavery.²⁷ Perhaps, even under the test of a cruel master. Apelles is an example for us today, in the midst of our own struggles and hardships, to embrace our fidelity to Christ. To stand the test of our faith, however challenging or trying our circumstances may be.

Paul’s sobering gospel instructions in Ephesians 6 come to mind. In Ephesians 6:5-9 he writes, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And *masters*, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”²⁸ ²⁹

²² Stachys = “STAY kiss” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 150.)

²³ Apelles = “uh PELL ehz” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 25.)

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 764.

²⁵ The *ESV* says “who is approved in Christ.”

²⁶ Apelles “was tested and he manifested a strength of character that was notable and commendable.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 764.

²⁷ Acts 7:9 reminds us, “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him.”

²⁸ See also Colossians 3:22-25 and 1 Timothy 6:1-2. And check out 1 Peter 2:18-23, esp. v. 23b.

²⁹ “Far from condemning slavery, Paul and Peter reminded their converts who were slaves to obey their masters.... Nowhere did [they] suggest that Christians give up their slaves, but [Paul] did exhort masters to treat their slaves with kindness and consideration. In short, the institution of slavery was not condemned, but its abuses were. The apostles’ attitude is best explained by the unique way in which Romans of the 1st century A.D. treated their slaves, and released them in great numbers. ...one must be exceedingly careful not to assign the barbaric treatment of slaves by the Romans in the pre-Christian centuries to the early Christian era. Sweeping humanitarian changes had been introduced into the Roman world by the 1st century A.D., which led to radically improved treatment of slaves.” *The*

The early church was composed of a comprehensive collection of everyday people from various social classes and financial circumstances. From wealthy white-collar benefactors like Phoebe, to hard-working blue collar tent makers like Priscilla and Aquilla, to slave owners, to slaves and former slaves, who were simply trying to find their way in the world. Colossians 3:11 says, “Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

If anyone ever wanted to demonstrate a broad spectrum of social diversity, toss in a few barbarians and Scythians! Barbarians were considered uncivilized because they didn’t speak Greek, which was the common language of the time. The Scythians were well known for their terrible acts of brutality, earning them a reputation for being “little better than wild beasts. ...[But, as my *Study Bible* notes], Christ transcends all barriers, and unifies people from all cultures, races and nations. Such distinctions are no longer significant. Christ alone matters.”³⁰

Romans 16:16 wraps up our list with this exhortation, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (*Line up the Scythians!*) With all that we’ve been learning about the incredible diversity in the early church, both ethnically and socially, this exhortation takes on a much deeper significance. Can you picture a slave and a slave owner greeting one another this way, in mutual love and respect?³¹ As Bible Commentator Susan Mathew explains, the holy kiss is “an expression of the oneness of people who represent different social classes, and it expresses the warmth of love transcending [the broad diversity in the early church].”³²

You see, most of us tend to prefer relationships with people who are more like us. We’re most comfortable around people from a similar cultural background, similar financial situation, people who speak the same language, etc. As they say, “birds of a feather, flock together.” But the early church challenges us to break out of our comfort zone. It illustrates how even slaves, and slave owners, found unity in Christ. As troubling as this may sound to our modern-day ears, the mixture of names in Romans 16, illustrates how the gospel had united them, and how they embraced social diversity in the church.

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5, Q-Z, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 458.

³⁰ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2015 footnote on Colossians 3:11.

³¹ Paul’s appeal in the book of Philemon could be the perfect case in point.

³² Citing Susan Mathew, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 772.

Well, we have time for just one more consideration...

In the early church...

2) They were more concerned about the people than the place.

Romans 16:5 says, “Greet also the church that meets at their house....” (referring to the house of Priscilla/Aquila) Most, if not all, of the early churches met in people’s homes.³³ To be clear, we’re not just talking about having each other over for dinner, we’re talking about corporate worship, instruction, and fellowship.³⁴ Beyond the house church in verse 5, there were other house churches in Rome as well. In fact, scholars believe that there were as many as 5 or more churches in Rome, which would make perfect sense in such a large city.^{35 36}

Romans 16:10 mentions, “...the household of Aristobulus.”³⁷ And Romans 16:11 mentions, “...those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.”^{38 39} This word “household” suggests two things. First of all, that Aristobulus and Narcissus owned slaves. “Household” was a common way of referring to everyone who lived under the care and provision of the same master. (By the way, you’ll notice that Paul doesn’t actually greet Aristobulus and Narcissus themselves, but rather those in their households who are in the Lord. So neither of these men were necessarily believers themselves, although they may have been.)⁴⁰ The way Paul greets these “households” also suggests that he’s referring to two more of the house churches that met in Rome. After all, house churches often met in larger homes, where more people could gather. Romans 16:14-15 also probably refer to two more house churches: “the other brothers and sisters with them.” (verse 14) And “all the Lord’s people who are with them.” (verse 15) In other words, the names listed at the beginning of each of these verses, are the ones Paul knew by name. He also knows that there are other brothers and sisters in Christ who meet together with them in their particular house church.

³³ “Christians in Paul’s day did not have dedicated church buildings; they met in private homes.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2321 footnote on Romans 16:5.

³⁴ This goes back to what we said earlier about them being united “in Christ” and being together “in the Lord.” Romans 16 puts more emphasis on them being “IN Christ” than being IN a building.

³⁵ “The Christian community in Rome was composed of a number of churches. Most scholars [agree] that the churches met in houses, [however, some have raised questions] about whether churches met exclusively in houses. It seems that at least five churches are greeted: the home of [Priscilla] and Aquila (v. 5), those who belong to Aristobulus (v. 10), those who belong to Narcissus (v. 11), and in both verse 14 and 15 the names probably represent members of two [more] churches.” See fuller explanation by Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, 2nd Ed.*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, pp. 771-772.

³⁶ “Chapter 16 suggests that there were at least five house churches (16:5,10,11,14,15) in the city.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1886.

³⁷ Aristobulus = “uh riss toh BYOO luhs” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 28.)

³⁸ Narcissus = “nahr SISS uhs” (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 120.) See https://www.google.com/search?q=Pronounce+Narcissus&sca_esv=

³⁹ Narcissus may have even been a former slave himself, now an emancipated slave who had great wealth. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1917 footnote on Romans 16:11.

⁴⁰ It’s also worth noting that “Aristobulus was dead at the time Paul wrote Romans, so the ‘household’ of Aristobulus refers to slaves who served the family that still went by his name.” (NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2322 footnote on Romans 16:10.)

Be that as it may, the thing to consider here is that there's no mention of church buildings or church names.⁴¹ The concern is with the people, not the place. This is a cautionary reminder for us: let's not put too much stock in our church buildings.⁴² Don't get me wrong, church buildings are great, they can serve an important discipleship purpose. However, our church is *not* a building; it's a *gathering* of believers. The structural location, the place in which we meet, is ultimately not all that important. After all, we could meet outdoors, or at one of our houses, or at a local coffee shop, and we'd still be just as much of a church, as we are sitting in this sanctuary together. God's not impressed with our buildings, any more than he's impressed with fancy clothes, or nice cars, or whatever else. E-Free Bemidji has been blessed with an incredible building, and many of us are pretty excited to have it almost paid off, but God hasn't commissioned us to build buildings, He's commissioned us to build disciples. This building is just a means to our ultimate end: *becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together.*^{43 44}

⁴¹ Or pastors or elders or deacons for that matter.

⁴² Consider the great temple in Mark 13:1-2.

⁴³ The Greek word for Church is ἐκκλησία; which is a word with a long history of being connected to an assembled body. In fact, in the broader Greco-Roman world, ekklesia referred to a "summoned legislative body," or a general assembly. It refers to people with a shared belief, a congregation which enjoys shared community. This same word was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, thus creating a common understanding of God's gathered people, both in the past and in the present. The point here is that "church" (or Ekklesia) was never meant to emphasize the place; it has always emphasized the people who gathered.

"① a regularly summoned legislative body, assembly, as generally understood in the Greco-Roman world. ...③ people with shared belief, community, congregation... ⑥ of Christians in a specific place or area (the term ἐκκλησία apparently became popular among Christians in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, especially in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group). α. of a specific Christian group assembly, gathering ordinarily involving worship and discussion of matters of concern to the community." (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.)

⁴⁴ The old adage about garages comes to mind: Just because you're in a garage, that doesn't make you a car! (Just because we're in a church building, that's not what makes us a church!) What makes us the body of Christ, is Christ! What should unite us as a body of believers is our shared faith in Jesus Christ; we are a united people of God. So let's take note of this reminder from the early church, "They were more concerned about the people than the place."