

# Who's Who in Romans 16

See Romans commentaries by Bruce and Stott as well as Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 385-9 and Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (1908), 171-6.

The courier

16 I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a **deacon** of the church at Cenchreae, 2 so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

3 Greet **Prisca** and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, 4 and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved

Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. 6 Greet **Mary**, who has worked very hard among you. 7 Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my **relatives** who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet **Ampliatius**, my

beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our co-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 relative 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

(twins?) **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Evidence of Diversity: **male/female, slave/free, Jew/Gentile, rich/poor**

If you want Romans 16, follow Romans 14!

"Deacon" (NIV, NRSV)=*diakonos*, elsewhere translated "servant" or "minister". This, the only verse where it refers specifically to a female, is also the only place it is translated "deacon" in the NRSV. (NASB and ESV have "servant".)

Prisca named first, suggesting leadership

Nine out of 26 named are female, and four of the women (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis) are the only ones to be flattered with the description "worked very hard"

In the accusative case, *Junias*, in Greek gender is masked by the suffix. Despite there being not a single existing example of a male Greek name "Junias", and multiple examples of a female "Junia", many modern commentators have assumed the apostle in question was male, disagreeing with all patristic commentators, e.g. Chrysostom, "O, how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!" [Morris, Stott]

Ampliatius, Urbanus (both names common in the imperial household), Hermes, Philologus and Julia are likely slaves

The name of the grandson of Herod the Great, friend of emperor Claudius, who died in Rome. "It is not unlikely that on his death his slaves passed to the Emperor. If they did, they would collectively retain the name 'those of Aristobulus'" [Morris].

A famous, rich, powerful freedman who exercised great influence on Claudius but was executed by Nero. "His slaves would have been passed to the Emperor and have been designated by the name Narcissus" [Morris].

May be the son of Simon of Cyrene, who according to Mk 15:21 had a son named Rufus and was apparently known in Rome.

As we have seen time and again, in Romans the gospel brings unity in the face of ethnic diversity. When we read Romans, then, we can't help but think about our church's homogeneity. Homogeneity is not all bad, however, since homogeneity can aid in spreading the gospel:

Dr. McGavran's well-known statement is that people "like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers." That is, the barriers to the acceptance of the gospel are often more sociological than theological; people reject the gospel not because they think it is false but because it strikes them as alien. They imagine that in order to become Christians they must renounce their own culture, lose their own identity, and betray their own people.

Therefore, in order to reach them, not only should the evangelist be able to identify with them, and they with the evangelist; not only must the gospel be contextualized in such a way that it communicates with them; but the church into which they are invited must itself belong to their culture sufficiently for them to feel at home in it. It is when these conditions are fulfilled that men and women are won to Jesus Christ, and subsequently that churches grow.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Paul presents ethnic unity-in-diversity as a work of the Spirit (Eph 3), and Jesus named it as a sign of the true church (John 13:35; 17:21, 23).

What did this mean in practice in the early church? It seems probable that, although there were mixed Jewish-Gentile congregations, there were also homogeneous Jewish congregations (who still observed Jewish customs) and homogeneous Gentile congregations (who observed no Jewish customs). Nevertheless, Paul clearly taught them that they belonged to each other in Christ, that they must welcome one another as Christ had welcomed them (compare Romans 15:7), and that they must respect one another's consciences, and not offend one another...

All of us are agreed that in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow into maturity. Therefore, every [homogeneous] church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's church. This will mean forging with other and different churches creative relationships which express the reality of Christian love, brotherhood, and interdependence.

[There are] several possible ways of developing such relationships. They will range from occasional united evangelistic crusades, Christian concerts, conferences, conventions and annual festivals through a variety of voluntary associations and interchurch federations to the regular enjoying of intercultural fellowship. One model of this we have looked at is the large city church (or congregation) with several [homogeneous] subchurches (or subcongregations) which normally worship separately but sometimes together. On these occasions their common celebration is enriched by the dress, music, and liturgy of different traditions. Another model a multicultural Sunday congregation which divides into mid-week [homogeneous] house churches, while a third and more radical way is to work towards integration, although without cultural assimilation. [Ibid.]

*Discuss.*

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<sup>1</sup>The Pasadena Consultation on the Homogenous Unit Principle (Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 1, 1978); <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1>.