

## Chapter 72

### Greetings

(Romans 16:10–16)

Paul is still continuing his sixteen sentences beginning ‘Greet . . .’. <sup>10</sup>*Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ*, he says. It seems that Apelles had been through some difficult situation but had persisted in faith and so shown himself to be a man approved by God as one who has passed a test. His name is also found in an inscription concerning the emperor’s family, so he was likely to have been a slave or freedman.

*Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.* Here is another reference to a household church. Paul does not greet Aristobulus himself but only the household of Aristobulus. He was very likely a member of the Herod family, grandson of Herod the Great, brother to Herod Agrippa I, and friend to Claudius the emperor. Aristobulus himself had died but the house-church that once met in his house continues.

<sup>11</sup>*Greet Herodian, my kinsman.* Paul moves to another member of the Herod household, Herodian. He was Jewish (‘my kinsman’) and probably a freed slave.

*Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.* Again Paul does not greet Narcissus himself but only the household of Narcissus. He was a freedman who had worked for the emperor Claudius but then had committed suicide. Some of the household had become Christians. When Narcissus committed suicide, his slaves became the slaves of Nero. This

means that Paul has Christian friends in the household of Nero, the emperor himself. The gospel belongs to the politically weak, but sometimes it gets close to the powerful.

<sup>12</sup>*Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord.* The similarity of the names means that they were sisters. Greek-speaking parents sometimes gave their children similar names. The names could be translated ‘Dainty and Delicate’ but they were known to Paul as strong Christian workers. Both names are found in the ancient inscriptions concerning the imperial families. So here are two more people with high connections, though they themselves were probably humble people.

*Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.* Persis was a Christian worker and friend of Paul. He was perhaps a freed slave who had once been taken as prisoner in Persia.

<sup>13</sup>*Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.* There is good reason to believe that Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21 mentioned the name because his readers in Rome knew Rufus!). He was outstanding in his gifts and usefulness to God, a ‘chosen’ man for some special ministry. His mother was a servant of God as well. The time in Simon’s life when he was forced to carry a cross for a man who was about to be crucified evidently changed his life. He was a Jew from north Africa coming to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, when this loathsome incident happened to him. But God used it. He and his wife came to salvation in Christ, and over twenty years later his son was among the Christians in Rome.

<sup>14</sup>*Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes [a common slave-name], Patrobas [perhaps a released slave who once belonged to the Patrobas who was a famous and cruel freedman in the days of Nero], Hermas [another common slave-name] and the brothers with them.* These people are entirely unknown – but the list lets us know that there are varieties of ministries in the Christian church. Some become notable; some get to be known by name only; no doubt some are not greeted at all! But all are equally

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known to God. The first and last might well be reversed in God's judgement.

Paul continues, <sup>15</sup>*Greet Philologos and Julia* [common slave-names], *Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.* Again Philologos and Julia seem to be a married couple. 'Nereus and his sister' will be their children. Olympas will be another member of their household known to Paul – and he knows that there are others. Here apparently is another house-church.

Finally, in this section, Paul says, <sup>16</sup>*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

Christians of New Testament times stayed in touch with each other. If we learn only this from these verses we shall have learned something vital. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) was the most famous inter-church gathering of New Testament times but there may have been others. It is likely that Acts 11 and Galatians 2:1–10 record something similar, but not identical, to what happened in Acts 15. Clearly the churches were not isolationist. The New Testament churches clearly kept in touch with each other and the sending of greetings and the exchange of workers was one of the ways in which they did it. The whole church was important to them as well as the local congregations. The churches were like a fleet of ships all sailing in the same direction together (as the seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen put it).

The older I get, the more I realize how important are greetings, hellos and goodbyes, 'good morning' and 'good night'. The New Testament is full of all sorts of greetings. In all thirteen of his letters Paul has an opening greeting ('Grace to you . . .', a Christian way of saying 'Hello'). In all thirteen he has some kind of final farewell ('Grace be with you', 'The Lord be with your spirit', and so on). In Romans Paul sends greetings to twenty-six individuals and six groups and ends: 'Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.' Obviously these courtesies were very vital to church life, in Paul's understanding of the matter.