

## Chapter 76

### An International Fellowship of Love

(Romans 16:21–23)

The ordinary reader of Romans is puzzled to discover that in most modern translations of the Bible there is no Romans 16:24. Paul's original manuscript of Romans did not have verse 24 which was added later (to a version of Romans that ended at verse 23).

Paul has given his own greetings. In Romans 16:21–23 he mentions the greetings of those who were with him which they want to send to their fellow Christians in Rome. <sup>21</sup>*Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.* Again as so often we notice that Paul believes in team ministry.

The most interesting name here is that of Tertius. <sup>22</sup>*I Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.* Tertius was Paul's 'amanuensis' (as modern scholars call him). He is the scribe-secretary who does the actual job of writing while Paul is dictating his letters. This verse is evidence – and there is plenty more – that Paul used a secretary-scribe to help him write his letters. It is quite an important matter because there is plenty of evidence that these scribe-secretaries were given a certain amount of freedom in their work. Sometimes they might be allowed to slightly improve the words of the person dictating the letter. Sometimes the original author might give a scribe the main outline of what he wants to be said and let the scribe write

it out in full in his own way. Sometimes – although I doubt whether Paul ever did this – the scribe might write the whole letter for his employer, knowing roughly what his employer would like to be said.

This means that arguments about the authorship of New Testament letters on the basis of small details concerning style are quite irrelevant since it is known that amanuenses had in one case less, and in another case more, freedom in writing the letters. Peter is reckoned to have written both 1 Peter and 2 Peter but there are differences as well as similarities in the Greek of the two letters. Paul is reckoned to have written thirteen letters but 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus have slight differences as well as similarities in style and vocabulary from the other ten. John the apostle is believed by many to have written both John's Gospel and the book of Revelation, but there is no doubt that the style of the Greek is different. One explanation – not the only one – of these differences in style might be the fact that writers in the ancient world often allowed scribe-secretaries to express things in their own style. Here in Romans 16:22 we have the scribe interrupting and writing a whole sentence of his own! Different amanuenses working for the same writer might lead to small differences in style. I have myself quite a large number of books in print. Some by one publisher have almost entirely my own words unchanged. Some by another publisher have a few publisher's 'improvements' of style. One of them that goes out under my name was compiled from my broadcasts but the work of writing up the broadcasts was done by someone else entirely. I did not write a single word of it! It says what I want to say and I altered only one word before it was published. It has some phrases that are not Michael-Eaton-phrases but they do not worry me; they say almost exactly what I said with only a few phrases that I would never have used. I myself have on occasions helped authors by re-writing parts of their books for them – especially if they have difficulties with the English

language. One must remember this kind of procedure when discussing arguments about authorship of the New Testament documents. Arguments based upon tiny details of style are totally worthless – because of people like Tertius!

Gaius also wanted to give a word of greeting. Paul says, <sup>23</sup>*Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you.* We know this Gaius since Paul is writing from Corinth, and we know Gaius of Corinth from 1 Corinthians 1:14. He was ‘host to the whole church’. It means that Gaius was famous for hospitality. Any Christian anywhere who passed through Corinth was welcome at Gaius’s home. Paul is being slightly humorous. The whole worldwide church was hosted by Gaius!

*Erastus, the city treasurer, greets you, and so does Quartus, the brother.* This Erastus is very probably the same man as one who is mentioned in an inscription discovered at Corinth. There were not many wealthy and famous Christians at Corinth, but there were a few. One was the city treasurer! But city-treasurers and apostles and people who are nobodies all mix together in the church of Jesus Christ. Sometimes Christians are closer to people who are totally different from them than they are to their own families. The spiritual bond is more powerful than ties of flesh and blood.

Paul has with him this group of fellow-workers, and they know all about the letter that he is writing to the Christians at Rome. They say to Paul, ‘Please give our greetings to the friends in Rome.’ They do not know many people there but they want to have this friendly relationship with Christians even though they have never seen them and Rome is far away. A scribe, a city treasurer, a colleague of Paul, some Jewish friends – they all want to take part in greeting the Christians in faraway Rome.

This is the very nature of the Christian church. It ties people together in the closest ties of love. Even people who have never seen each other nevertheless know each other and express their love for each other across the continents. Even we ourselves

*Preaching Through the Bible: Romans*

dwell lovingly on Paul's (and Tertius's) words and we have a kind of 'fellowship' with them crossing centuries of time and culture. Scribes in Corinth greet friends in Rome. The Lord Jesus Christ is building an international fellowship of love that crosses every barrier of time and geography.