

# Sermon: “Paul’s Opinion Of Women In The Church”

Text: Romans 16

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**Introduction:** I hope you have a sense of what we have covered together these past few months. The book of Romans is not an easy epistle. The Apostle Peter had said:

**II Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)** <sup>15</sup>Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup>He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

The Christian Church is made up of persons. In fact the only thing in community that does matter is persons: God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit and Christian people. Paul’s closing chapter gives us a personal look at the recipients of this sometimes hard to understand letter. Brunner says, “the impression which these salutations make is that of a great family on the one hand and of a working community on the other”.

**Romans 16:1-15 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. <sup>2</sup>I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. <sup>3</sup>Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. <sup>5</sup>Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. <sup>6</sup>Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. <sup>7</sup>Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. <sup>8</sup>Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. <sup>10</sup>Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup>Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. <sup>14</sup>Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. <sup>15</sup>Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.

## **Sermon: When the Roll Is Called Down Here (by Fred Craddock)**

**I hope you will not feel guilty if your heart was not all aflutter during the reading of the text. It's not very interesting. It's a list of names, a list of strange names. I always tell my students in preaching class. "When you're preaching from biblical texts, avoid the lists. They're deadly. Don't preach from the lists." It seems that Paul is calling the roll. That's a strange thing in itself. I have never worshiped in a church in which anyone got up and called the roll. It could be very dull. Well, it could...it could be interesting in a way.**

**Calling the roll sometimes is not all that bad. Last December I was summoned to Superior Court, DeKalb County, Georgia, to serve on the jury. On Monday morning at nine o'clock, 240 of us formed the pool out of which the juries for civil and criminal cases would be chosen. The deputy clerk of the Superior Court stood and called the roll. Two hundred forty names. She did not have them in alphabetical order. You had to listen. And while I was listening, I began to listen. There were two Bill Johnsons. One was black and one was white, and they were both Bill Johnson. There was a man named Clark, a Mr. Clark, who answered when the clerk read "Mrs. Clark." He said "Here."**

**And she looked up and said "Mrs. Clark."**

**And he said, "Here."**

**And she said "Mrs. Clark."**

**And he stood up and said, "Well, I thought the letter was for me, and I opened it."**

**And she said, "We summoned Mrs. Clark."**

**And he said "Well, I'm here. Can't I do it? She doesn't have any interest in this sort of thing."**

**And the clerk said, "Mr. Clark, how do you know? She doesn't even know she's been summoned."**

**This roll call was pretty good. There was a man there whose name I wrote phonetically because I couldn't spell it. His name was Zerfel Lashenstein. I remember it because they went over it five or six times, mispronouncing it. He insisted it be pronounced correctly and finally stood in a huff and said, "I see no reason why I should serve on a jury if a court can't pronounce my name."**

**The woman next to me said, "Lie-shen-stein. I wonder if he's a Jew?"**

**I said, “Well, I don’t know. Could be. Does it matter?”**

**And she said, “I am German. My name is Zellar.”**

**And I said, “Well, it doesn’t matter. That was 60 years ago.”**

**And she said, “He and I could be seated next to each other in a jury.”**

**I said. “Well, you were probably just a child when all that happened years ago.”**

**And she said, “I was 10 years old. I visited Grandmother. She lived about four miles from Buchenwald. I smelled the odor.”**

**You know, a person could get interested in Paul’s calling the roll. Even if it’s no more than to say, I wonder how Paul knew all those people since he had never been to the church?” I wonder if back then you could buy mailing lists? After all, he wants to raise money in Rome for His Spanish mission, and he is politically wise.**

**He says, “Tell this one hello and that one hello.” Some scholars think this doesn’t even belong in Romans. He’s never been to Rome. But I could get interested in the roll call because it gives a kind of sociological profile of the membership of the church.**

**Now, I don’t expect you to remember, but in the list there is a husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla. There’s a man and his mother, Rufus and his mother. There is a brother and sister, Nereus and his sister. There are brothers, Andronicus and Junias. There are sisters, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. There is and old man Epaenetus. Isn’t that an interesting profile of the church? There is a single woman, Mary. There’s a single man, Herodian. Not a lot of nuclear family there at all, except as Christ has called them together. It’s an interesting list, sort of. Not very.**

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**The Apostle Paul does not deserve the reputation that some have tried to give him that he:**

- 1. thinks women are second-class citizens**
- 2. that women should be seen, but not heard**

I would like to look this morning at the six women mentioned by name and also those anonymous women in this closing chapter of Romans. The original salutations certainly were more meaningful to the original audience than for us. They had loved each other; they had served the Lord together. We do not have the same history nor any common experiences with the author or that 1st century audience, but let's try to regain some of the flavor of these women who were in the Church working in concert with the Apostle Paul.

**PHOEBE** (v. 1) Many scholars including the translators of the RSV and various commentators have tried to render the word **διακονον** - deaconess. There is no need to force that meaning of a word that everywhere else in the same letter is translated "servant" referring to government authorities twice in Romans 13:4, and to Christ himself in Romans 15:8. It seems arbitrary here to force the translation deaconess, especially in light of the absence of such an office in Scripture. Nevertheless, and not to diminish her importance, Phoebe was a trusted Christian sister to Paul. He wrote her a letter of commendation to introduce her to those in Rome who would receive this letter that would become HOLY WRIT. Phoebe would be the bearer of Paul's letter.

Paul said:

1. **Welcome Her (in the Lord).** This is the special kind of welcome only found in Christian homes because of the common bond found in Jesus Christ.
2. **Help Her!**

**WHY?** Because she had been a helper to many others as well as the Apostle himself. It is thought that Phoebe might have been a well-to-do business woman who was on her way to Rome to conduct business. The Greek word, **προστατες**, translated helper, was a word that meant a legal representative or wealthy patron. She would literally carry the word of God to others.

**PRISCA or PRISCILLA** (vv. 3-5a)

Priscilla and Aquila are a very important husband and wife team in the N.T. They are always mentioned together in the N.T. They were forced to leave Rome after an edict issued by Emperor Claudius about 52 A.D. which banished all Jews (Acts 18:2). They then moved to Corinth. They were tentmakers by trade, and Paul lived with them in their home.

e.g. It takes a special person to be able to live with a non-family member. Family is sometimes difficult enough. i.e. moving in with parents, etc.

When Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla followed him (Acts 18:18).

e.g. Chuck and Nancy Durham followed their minister from Troy, Ohio to Florida. What a Sacrifice for the Gospel!

It was Aquila and Priscilla who took into their home, Apollos, a brilliant scholar and orator who needed further instruction in the Christian faith (Acts 18: 24-26). He then went on to encourage others. You see how a kindness ripples out from its origin? When you disciple people who disciple people, etc.

We hear later the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian Church from the home of guess who? (I Corinthians 16:19). This was before church buildings. Priscilla and Aquila later returned to Rome as it is recorded here, and again they have a group of Christians meeting in their home (a house church).

Lastly then in II Timothy 4:19 they are found back in Ephesus again being greeted in a letter by Paul. Barclay puts it this way, “Every home should be a Church, for a Church is a place where Jesus dwells”.

In the N.T. four of the six times that Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, her name is first - BEFORE her husband's. It could be she was converted before Aquila, or that she was of noble birth, or even that she was the stronger as a teacher and a Christian. We do not know. They are always listed together as well it should be. We can be sure of one thing. There were many people who owed their souls either directly or indirectly to Priscilla and her husband. They had literally risked their lives for Paul and thus the cause of Christ. Out of all this the most important aspect of their lives was that they were counted as co-workers with the apostle Paul. That's pretty good company.

**MARY** (v. 6) “who worked very hard for you ( i.e., the Church at Rome).”

**JUNIA(S)** (v. 7) Junias is more than likely a woman (Chrysostom, col. 670). She is called Paul's relative in the NIV. This probably meant fellow Jew. She had been imprisoned for her faith. She with Andronicus were Christians before Paul. A little like charter members. With this longevity in the faith came a great deal of respect, but they had earned theirs to be mentioned by the apostle. The fact they were Christians before Paul indicates a direct link which may have went back to the time of Stephen and the Church at Jerusalem. Junia is described as an apostle (literally one sent out, or representative), although, this would obviously be different from the original 12 apostles, and different from Paul's apostleship.

## **TRYPHENA and TRYPHOSA (v. 12a)**

Three times in this listing of women Paul uses the Greek word **κοπιων** which literally means to work to the point of exhaustion. It is a little play on words because Tryphena's name has the meaning of softness, daintiness, and delicacy; and Tryphosa's, live softly, luxuriously, fare sumptuously according to Cranfield.

**PERSIS** (v. 12b) literally means Persian woman and was probably a freed woman. Persis is warmly regarded as beloved and as a hard worker in the Lord.

## **The mother of Rufus (v. 13)**

She was like a mother to Paul. Maybe Paul went there when he felt there was no one who cares. We have all emotionally been there. It is a great feeling to know there is a place to which you can go **AND BE ACCEPTED AND LOVED**. Mark like Paul also wrote to a Roman audience. In Mark 15:21 we read of Simon a Cyrenian who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha. This Simon is said to be the father of Alexander and Rufus. Questions which may come to mind are:

1. Was Simon a part of the men from Cyrene connected with the early proclamation of the gospel in Antioch (Acts 11:20)?
2. Were Rufus and Alexander and their mother there as well?
3. Was the Alexander mentioned in Acts 19, who stood in front of an angry mob, also a part of this family? His mother must have been proud of her husband and sons. Her house was open to nurture the Apostle as well.

**The sister of Nereus** (v. 15) In 95 A.D. two very important people in Rome were condemned for being Christians. Their names were Flavius Clemens who was a consul in Rome (highest possible position) and his wife Domatilla. She was of royal blood and granddaughter of Vespasian and a niece to Domitian. Domatilla's two sons were in line to the throne. Flavius and Domatilla had a slave named Nereus. It is possible that this slave had a part to play in their becoming Christians.

Women have always played an important role within the Church. Today, there is still a need for godly, hard-working women in the Lord. There are many avenues of service open to women in the contemporary Church. I invite you to become involved in this Body of believers if you are not already. For those who are working to the point of exhaustion, please ask for help - **BUT NEVER GIVE UP!**

**We appreciate all the mothers, who have had a Christian influence on our collective lives. For the women who are not mothers for whatever reasons, I would encourage you to be like the mother of Rufus and be like a mother to others who serve God.**

**Romans 16:16-27 (NIV)** <sup>16</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. <sup>17</sup>I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. <sup>18</sup>For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. <sup>19</sup>Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. <sup>20</sup>The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>21</sup>Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. <sup>22</sup>I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. <sup>23</sup>Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. <sup>23</sup>Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. <sup>25</sup>Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup>but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—<sup>27</sup>to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

**Amen.**