

Romans (16:5b-16)

Sealed with a Kiss

Part 99 – March 25, 2007

EYE CONTACT

We are absolutely *wired* for relationships.

Ever purposely avoid eye contact with a driver who wants to pull out in front of you from a side street? Eye contact must be avoided at all cost – you know why? Because all it takes is a half-second of eye contact with a stranger, thirty feet away, in another car, to form a bond so strong that you feel compelled – obligated – to yield! Drivers behind you are honking, and you're just shrugging: "I *have* to let 'em in ... we're kind of in a relationship."

We're about to read the names of 25 strangers; and they're not even going to look at us. Do your best to pronounce their names. But then, one-by-one, we're going to make eye-contact with the people Paul wrote to; and we'll find a connection, and form a bond with these friends Paul knew so well, and loved so much.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. 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. Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 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. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. - *Romans 16:5b-16 NIV*

And at the very beginning of this letter, Paul said:

... I remember you in my prayers at all times ... - *Romans 1:9-10*

These are the people Paul prayed for *by name*. To Paul, every one of these folks was significant and deserved some praise and recognition. Paul is their cheer-leader.



So, let's open Paul's prayer book and make some eye-contact. The first of the friends is: Phoebe. We saw, last time, that Paul commended Phoebe as a sister and a servant. And Phoebe most likely delivered Paul's letter to Rome.



And we also got to know: Priscilla and Aquila. A colorful married couple who own a tent-making business; they hired Paul, and ended up moving and ministering with him. In fact, part of the church at Rome meets in their house. They most likely paved the way for Paul to write to Rome. Priscilla is more outgoing and outspoken than Aquila, and she helped teach Apollos, one the New Testament's great evangelists.



Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. (16:5b)

Epenetus will always be special to Paul because he's one of the very first converts, in one of the very first regions (Western Turkey) that Paul visited, on his very first missionary journey. Epenetus has left Asia and come to Rome. He might have come with Priscilla and Aquila to do missions work with the gentiles.



Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. (16:6)

Mary is a hard-working woman. You'll notice that Paul pays this compliment to four of the women mentioned, but *none* of the men. At a time when his society oppressed and marginalized women, Paul elevates their honor by affirming their contributions.



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. (16:7)

He calls them his "relatives" which could mean *fellow Jews* or *blood-relatives*. They're a husband and wife team; and they're ex-cons who had served time "in prison" with Paul. They're "outstanding among the apostles" which means they were well known and respected for their missionary work, which is probably exactly what they're doing in Rome. And "they were in Christ before Paul" which means they knew Paul as the persecutor. And if they're family, they would've been praying for his conversion, and overjoyed at what God has done! They could well be the only family members who didn't disinherit Paul after his conversion from Judaism to Christianity.



Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. (16:8)

We know only three things about Ampliatus: His name means "large". Paul says he's lovable. And *Ampliatus* is a common slave name.



Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. (16:9)

Urbanus Means, "of the city," and Stachys means, "head of grain". The city slicker and the hayseed are together in Rome.



Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. (16:10a)

This means Apelles faced a possibly life-threatening challenge because of Jesus, but stood his ground, and held onto his faith.



Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. (16:10b)

Paul doesn't greet Aristobulus, just his *household* (family and servants). He's either not a believer, or not alive. It's a very rare name in Rome; and the one we know of from history was the wealthy grandson of Herod the Great (king of Judea when Jesus was born) and a good friend of Caesars. Paul witnessed to Aristobulus' uncle, King Agrippa. (*Acts 26*) Paul's friends are making their way into very prominent places!



Greet Herodion, my relative. (16:11a)



Herodion is a fellow Jew; he's been given a freedman's name, but is still in serving one of the royal "Herod" families.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. (16:11b)



Now, we know Narcissus was dead when Paul wrote this. Narcissus was one of the Empire's most powerful people; the appointment secretary for Claudius. Narcissus became a *multi-multi-millionaire* from the bribes to see the Caesar. But when Nero came into power, he forced Narcissus to commit suicide, and claimed all of his property, which would likely have included Narcissus' Christian servants.

All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. -
Philippians 4:22 NIV

Imagine the excitement in that early church, knowing that several of their members were serving in the Caesar's court!



Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. (16:12a)

Their names ("Dainty" and "Delicate") indicate that they're twin sisters. Paul is making a little pun that doesn't translate that well: "Dainty and Delicate are tough characters for Christ!"



Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. (16:12b)

Grandma Persis! "Dear friend" means: "beloved by all". We know she's old because Paul speaks in past-tense.



Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. (16:13)

The Gospel of Mark was likely written from Rome. And when Mark describes the man who helped carry Jesus' cross, he adds an incredible, curious detail: "A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross." (*Mark 15:21 NIV*)



Of course, Mark would've been familiar with Simon's son's names if the family was well known in Rome. Paul's good friend, and "adopted" mother could very well be the son and wife of the man who helped carry the cross to Calvary.

And finally, Paul sends his greetings to two Roman home groups:



Greet Asyncritus [uh-SIN-krih-tuhs], Phlegon [FLEE-gahn], Hermes [HUHR-meez], Patrobas [PAT-roh-buhs], Hermas [HUHR-muhs] and the brothers with them. (16:14)

This was a group of guys that had their own home church. And then he greets a home church most likely made up of family and friends.



Greet Philologus [fih-LAHL-oh-guhs], Julia, Nereus [NEE-roos] and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. (16:15)

Ever sent a greeting, and said: "Give 'em a kiss for me." That's what Paul does next.

Greet one another with a holy kiss (16:16a)

The "holy kiss" was a common custom in Paul's day. That's why it didn't seem weird when Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss.

Q: Do you know why we don't practice it anymore?

A: A couple hundred years into church history, some guys were taking advantage of the opportunity; so, a priestly law was passed that men could only greet other men with a kiss. Lost its appeal really quick!



In our culture, a hug, a handshake, or a pat on the back can communicate what the kiss did. Just remember: We have an obligation to express affection.

Paul could've said, "Greet everybody!" But he chose to list them by name. Nobody likes to be called, "Hey you". When someone knows you by name, it says you're worth knowing.

That's why, when John describes Jesus as a Shepherd, he says:

He calls his own sheep by name ... - *John 10:3 NIV*

All the churches of Christ send greetings (16:16b)

A couple of things to remember:

- A. A church isn't a building, it's people
- B. Names and eye-contact are significant

I'm going to pray; and when I'm finished, I want you to stand and greet one another - especially the unfamiliar - with a holy, heart-felt, two-handed, hand shake. Make eye-contact, and greet one another by name. And then we'll continue to worship, as a church!