

## Romans 16

Reading : Mark 15.15-16, 20-22; Rom. 15.19b-20, 22-24a; 16.3-15.

**Paul not in habit send detailed greetings to churches with which personally familiar.** Very wise. All too easy leave somebody out, put nose out of joint. Therefore find only in letters to churches at Rome and Colosse, which neither established nor visited. Where not well known, natural wish establish as many links as possible. Last chapter therefore kind of postscript, consisting of personal greetings ("salute" = "greet", Greek; x15 between v3 and v15) to those had met *elsewhere* in course of Christian service and who now moved to Rome. It is perhaps relevant that the three great cities where Paul had spent much of his time (Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus) were (together with Alexandria) those with which city of Rome had its strongest links. Constant traffic and movement between.

When wrote had great dream in his heart and great scheme in his mind. The Roman Empire extended westwards to Spain - and beyond. Paul's eyes now fixed (a) on Spain as *virgin territory* to be won for Christ and (b) on Rome as *springboard*, base of operations. Thirty-five years later, one of Christian leaders at Rome, Clement, spoke of Paul "having reached the farthest bounds of the West", so presumably he eventually fulfilled his ambition, 'Apostolic Fathers' by J B Lightfoot (1 Clement 5:5).

But for Paul Rome was more than stepping-stone. He had a great ambition, not see city itself on site-seeing tour, but people there. "I long earnestly/yearn to see you", 1.11. Not succeeded yet because priority of life was to concentrate where Christ not known. His business was, as wise master-builder to "lay the foundation", 1 Cor 3.10; not interested build on others. To date, been busy from Jer as far round as Illyricum, 15.18-22 - just across water from Italy and Rome. Comprise modern Croatia, Bosnia, Albania (northern Albania most likely region for Paul). "Fully preached", lit "fulfilled", gospel of Christ. Now no area from Jer in SE to Illyricum in NW untouched by prodigious labours. He had carried gospel throughout provinces of Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia and had established communities of Christians in the principal cities along each of main roads; Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth; from them the gospel now radiated out. Having completed work in east, now lift eyes to west.

Has urgent business to conduct in Jerusalem and, in advance coming to Rome, took opportunity of space in Phoebe's handbag to provide saints at Rome with statement of gospel which he proclaimed. There is evidence that greatly appreciated, copied out and circulated to other churches - often without personal section at end. If our NT had been based on one of those copies, Malcolm would have needed to look elsewhere for tonight's message.

In missionary magazines, always interested see photograph of churches of believers. Last two Echoes magazines have included photographs of companies of believers in Peru and Mexico. In sense, our reading from Romans 16 provides us with a *group photograph* of Paul's friends and acquaintances at Rome.

Not possible take close look at everyone in photograph. Focus on few. **First, we see several faces which take us back to very infancy of Christian church.** There, standing together, are **Andronicus and Junias**, 7. They are Jews. At some stage they have shared one of Paul's frequent imprisonments, of which spoken little while before to Corinthians in catalogue of sufferings in 2 Cor 11.23. Not know which. Clement = Paul "had been seven times in chains"; from Acts we able put fingers only on four. These two men were "of note among the apostles". Possible that the word used in wider sense than 12. Yet not know of other place where Paul use in wider sense. Possibly translate, "highly respected by the apostles". In either case, seems that they were eminent pioneer evangelists. Had they played a part in bringing the gospel to Rome? Paul tells us that they were converted before him, and *he* was probably converted within 3 or 4 years of death of Jesus. They therefore belonged to very earliest days of Christian community. All roads led to Rome - and therefore from it. Luke informs us that, among those who heard Peter at day of Pentecost, there were "strangers (visitors) from Rome", both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2.10; they heard very first Christian sermon, "Everyone whoever calls on name of Lord shall be saved", 2. 21, A & J may be among 3000 saved that day and if so no doubt took the message back home Rome with them.

Next to them stands **Epaenetus**, 5. He has the honour of being the first convert to Christ from the whole of the Roman province of Asia. Use of word "firstfruits" remind offerings of Exod and Lev. Paul, when stressing the dignity of his office of gospel preaching, spoke of himself as "ministering (engaged in the *priestly service* of) the gospel of God" and of his "*offering* of the gentiles" as acceptable to God, 15.16. In all likelihood Epaenetus had been (and probably still was) prominent in one of the churches. Clement = Apostles "appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be overseers and deacons to them that should believe", 42. Consistent with principle of "not a novice (new convert)", 1 Tim.3.6.

As study photograph, spot **married couple who provide outstanding example of courage.** Their names are **Prisca** (known informally as Priscilla) and **Aquila**, 3. Paul and they had much in common. They shared the same nationality, trade, faith and service - "my helpers/fellow-workers" he labels them. Paul first met some 6 or 7 years before following edict of Emperor Claudius, expelling all Jews from Rome. This result of Jewish riots probably following introduction of gospel into Jewish community there. Claudius was now dead, his edict revoked, the Jewish community flourished in Rome once more, and A/P had returned. Paul and they had worked together as tentmakers at Corinth and Ephesus; indeed they accompanied him from C>E, Acts 18.18-19. This possibly explain his words in Acts 20, "these hands (extended) have ministered to (provided for) my necessities, and for those who were with me", Acts 20.34 = darkened by handling rough Cilician cloth. Ephesian elders recognise. Not only co-workers *with* Paul, but had risked their very lives *for* him. Metaphorically had "placed their neck" on the executioner's block under

the axe/sword. Hazarded lives for his sake; exact circumstances not known but more than likely at Ephesus, where clear very rough time, "fought with wild beasts", 1 Cor 15.32; "pressed/burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired (be without a way; at a loss) even of life", 2 Cor 1.8. Yes, the mighty Paul. Take encouragement. For which not only Paul himself but the gentile churches generally were extremely grateful. Interest in Rome may well stemmed from contact with A/P. Certainly, first time state intention visit = at Ephesus about 2 years before; planned go to Jer, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome", Acts 19.21. A/P were with Paul at time [1 Cor 16.19; Ephesus going to Macedonia, vv 5,8 with Acts 20.1). Still in diary.

Shortly before his execution at Rome some 8 years later, Paul sent his greetings to A/P, then living at Ephesus, 1 Tim.1.3; 2 Tim.4.19. Only individuals to whom then send them. Fitting that one of last messages he ever sent was to this fine couple, who had gone through so much with him and for him. They were good friends.

Cannot miss fact that many in the group photograph **excelled in their activity for the Lord**. **Urbanus** is afforded same honour as A/P in being described as a "helper/co-worker" (cf "work-fellow" {same Greek} of Timothy, 21) in the service of Christ, 9. But has to be said that it is the womenfolk who carry off the highest awards. The word "labour" in Romans 16 translates the strongest word Greek language possess for toil and effort. It means to give the job absolutely everything you have got, to work until weary, to toil to the point of exhaustion. And each of the four Christians of which Paul used it was a lady. There are **Tryphena and Tryphosa**, 12. Thought by some to be twins, because not uncommon give to twins names derived same root. Their names come from word mean "to live luxuriously"; Paul bear record that were those "who toil laboriously". I can imagine Paul's eye twinkling as dictate this particular greeting to Tertius, 22 (Latin name; perhaps explain why know saints at Rome personally) - and a smile brought to many faces at Rome when letter read publicly. In one sense, it was a contradiction in terms. For the testimony he gave them was the very opposite of what their names suggested. "You may be called 'Delicate' and 'Dainty' (and were!) but you certainly don't live up to your names - for you both work flat out, like Trojans, for sake of Christ".

Alongside them stand two other, somewhat older, ladies. They are **Mary**, 6, and **Persis**, 12. We note that were two features which distinguished their labour and service. First, the addition of the word "much". In terms of labour, they had excelled even Try/Try. Second, we note the use of the past tense. This suggests that both were now advanced in years; their days of toil were over. But, though their labour may be past, it had not been forgotten - not by Paul, nor, more important still, by the Lord Himself, for labour is never in vain in Lord, 1 Cor.15.58. Note in passing that describe Persis, 12, as "the" beloved, and not as "my" beloved, which used of the three brethren in vv 5,8,9. Possibly careful, circumspect and tactful when speak of sister, or simply that she specially beloved by all.

But we cannot leave these ladies without drawing attention to a fifth. She is another **ageing lady**, seen standing next to a man young enough to be her son - and that is what he is. His name is Rufus, 13. We cannot be absolutely certain, but all the evidence points to this lady as being the widow of Simon of Cyrene. Simon is portrayed by Mark in his gospel as the father of Alexander and Rufus, Mark 15.21. There is a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> century tradition that Mark's gospel comprises the memoirs of Peter, permanently recorded by Mark for benefit of churches of Rome. (Use of several Greek words derived from Latin consistent.) As Mark identified Simon by the names of his sons, can assume sons well known to readers of gospel; ie at Rome. If identification correct, she widow of man who, passing by as came in from country, been impressed by Roman authorities into service, and found himself carrying the Saviour's cross. Could hardly been overjoyed at time but later how must have treasured the privilege! Rufus, her son, is distinguished by epithet "chosen, eminent" in the Lord. He was something special; he was "choice". Clearly an outstanding Christian. J B Phillips paraphrases "That splendid Christian". And the dear lady herself? Paul speaks of her in most affectionate of terms. Sometime, somewhere. somehow she had played the part of mother to him. No way knowing reaction of his family when converted. Not unlikely be disowned and cast out. (Nephew later sympathetic.) [Seen hospitality defined as art of making guests feel at home when wish they were.] Do everything make *him* feel at home in *her* home. Put arms round and put kettle on. "I regard her not only as Rufus' mother but as mine too". A wonderful lady.

Then, we notice a man whose worn features tell us that he has **weathered many storms** in his life. His name is **Apelles**; to his name Paul adds simply, "approved in Christ", 10. We know nothing of the circumstances, but clearly this man has faced severe trials in the cause of Christ. He has been tried like some precious metal in a crucible and, having patiently endured the testing, he has won the approval both of his brethren and of the Lord. We honour you, Apelles.

As hold the **picture a little further away**, we struck by many differences between its subjects; the 26 characters certainly form a very mixed group. There were **Jews and Greeks**. Going by their names the majority of the 26 mentioned were Greeks. But at least four of the men (Aquila, Andronicus, Junias and Herodion; last three = kinsmen) were Jews, and probably Priscilla and Mary were Jewesses.

There were **slaves and freemen**. Thirteen of the names mentioned occur in inscriptions or documents concerned with the imperial household; for the most part, they were common slave names. Probably those of "households" of Aristobulus, 10, and Narcissus, 11, were slaves. Just possibly to be identified with Aristobulus, the grandson of Herod the Great. Lived and died at Rome as private citizen; friend of Emperor Claudius. Household naturally be known "H of A". When died, his household, although now united with imperial household, would continued to bear name. Narcissus possibly well-known freedman who had great influence with Claudius, executed shortly after Nero's accession 3-4 years before letter written. Again, his slaves became property of Emperor. Possibly therefore all now in imperial household but, if so, owned a different "Lord" to that of Caesar. Yet some at least of friends were freemen; such, for example, as the tradesman Aquila.

There were **male and female**; at least 7 of the 26 were women.

Certainly a mixed group; Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female. Significantly, in one of his earlier letters Paul wrote concerning the blessings of the gospel, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus", Gal.3.28. Three consecutive benedictions of Synagogue Prayer Book, which tradition ascribes/attributes to Men of the Great Synagogue (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC) = "Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a heathen/ a slave/ a woman". Converted Pharisee. His smattering of friends in the churches of Rome were living proof of the truth of that statement.

Twice in his letter, Paul had used the expression, "there is no difference". It applied to bond/free and to male/female as well as to Jew/Greek.

First, "There is no difference, for all have sinned", 3.22. Paul's friends had all discovered for themselves that whatever their religious, social and natural background, all were guilty, all were under power of sin, and all needed saved from His wrath.

Second, "there is no difference, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For 'whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'", 10.12-13; may meant lot to Andronicus and Junias, Acts 2.21. Three of Paul's friends (Epaenetus, 5, Amplias (Ampliatius), 8, and Stachys, 9) are specifically described in chapter 16 as "beloved" by Paul. No doubt they appreciate this expression of his affection but in chapter 1 point to something far more important even than this. All saints addressed were "beloved of God". How wonderful to know that "God commends love towards us in that while sinners Christ died", 5.8. This is the love which is poured into our hearts by His Spirit, 5.5. End chapter 8, Paul able assure all believers that absolutely nothing able separate them from the boundless love of God and Christ.

Goes without saying, no way saints of Rome able send Christian greetings to us. And yet they each have something to say to us. Imagine little bubbles come out of each mouth. What would they say to us?

**Andronicus and Junias.** Can trust Christian message- can vouch for historical basis. We were there from the beginning. **Be confident.**

**Aquila and Prisca.** Times call for sacrifice; involve real cost. **Be courageous.**

**Tryphema/Tryphosa/Mary/Persis.** "Labour not in vain in Lord". **Be industrious.**

**Rufus and mother.** Paul "less than least saints", "Inasmuch as done least - ". **Be caring.**

**Apelles.** When going is rough, hold on, go on and win through. **Be steadfast.**

**Whole group together chorus.** All one in Christ Jesus. **Be united.** (Even if not see eye to eye over matters of conscience such as days and meat.)

And the sequel? About three years after, Paul realised his ambition - although not quite in the manner he expected. He arrived at Rome, albeit as a prisoner of Caesar. Had prayed that would have a "prosperous" (good) journey, 1.10; I have no way of knowing whether regarded swimming part of the way as constituting a "good" journey! As he was escorted northwards by a centurion and his men along Via Appia, the saints at Rome heard of his approach and trekked out to meet him "as far as" places 30-40 miles south of city, Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns, Acts 28.15. When he saw them, his face lit up. The man who in his letter spoke of thanking God for the report of their faith, 1.8, stopped to thank God for the sight of their faces, and took encouragement.

Just a few years later again the churches of Rome took the full brunt of the persecution launched by Nero. Many of the believers perished. Possibly *some of the 26* went to the lions in the arena or the stake in Nero's gardens. But Paul's letter survived, as witness fact have today. The many allusions made by Clement some 30 years later suggest highly valued. We finish with the note of triumph from the end of ch 8, which those who suffered must have treasured at the time ... 8.35-39.

## Footnotes

**Nereus**, verse 15. Just over 30 years later, event sent shockwaves through city of Rome. Two of most distinguished citizens condemned as Christians. Husband and wife, Flavius Clemens and Domitilla. He = Consul of Rome and she = grand-daughter of emperor Vespasian and niece of ruling emperor Domitian. Two sons were designated heirs of Domitian. He executed; she banished isle of Pontia. (Cf John to Patmos.) Name of chamberlain was Nereus. Just possible something do with conversion.

Interesting, tomb discovered south of village on eastern slope of Kidron valley at Jerusalem. In tomb was one of eleven ossuaries (receptacle bones of dead) with inscription on its side, "**Alexander, son of Simon**". On lid "Alexander" and word which scholars believe is Aramaic for Cyrene. Possibly Alexander settle in Jerusalem while mother gone to live with other son Rufus at Rome.

**Paul not in habit send detailed greetings to churches with which personally familiar.** Very wise. All too easy leave somebody out, put nose out of joint. Therefore find only in letters to churches at Rome and Colosse, which neither established nor visited. Where not well known, natural wish establish as many links as possible. Last chapter therefore kind of postscript, consisting of personal greetings ("salute" = "greet", Greek; x15 between v3 and v15) to those had met *elsewhere* in course of Christian service and who now moved to Rome. It is perhaps relevant that the three great cities where Paul had spent much of his time (Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus) were (together with Alexandria) those with which city of Rome had its strongest links. Constant traffic and movement between.

In missionary magazines, always interested see photograph of churches of believers. This month's Echoes magazine includes photographs of believers from assemblies in France and Tanzania. In sense, our reading from Romans 16 provides us with a *group photograph* of Paul's friends and acquaintances at Rome.

Not possible take close look at everyone in photograph. Focus on few. **First, we see several faces which take us back to very infancy of Christian church.** There, standing together, are **Andronicus and Junias**, 7. They are Jews. At some stage they have shared one of Paul's frequent (abundant) imprisonments, of which spoken little while before to Corinthians in catalogue of sufferings in 2 Cor 11.23. Not know which. Clement = Paul "had been seven times in chains"; from Acts we able put fingers only on four. These two men were "of note among the apostles". Possible that the word used in wider sense than 12. Yet not know of other place where Paul use in wider sense. Possibly translate, "highly respected by the apostles". In either case, seems that they were eminent pioneer evangelists. Had they played a part in bringing the gospel to Rome? Paul tells us that they were converted before him, and *he* was probably converted within 3 or 4 years of death of Jesus. They therefore belonged to very earliest days of Christian community. All roads led to Rome - and therefore from it. Luke informs us that, among those who heard Peter at day of Pentecost, there were "strangers (visitors) from Rome", both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2.10; they heard very first Christian sermon, including Peter's quote from Joel, "Everyone whoever calls on name of Lord shall be saved", 2. 21, A & J may be among 3000 saved that day and if so no doubt took the message back home Rome with them.

Next to them stands **Epaenetus**, 5. He has the honour of being the first convert to Christ from the whole of the Roman province of Asia. Use of word "firstfruits" remind offerings of Exod and Lev. Paul, when stressing the dignity of his office of gospel preaching, spoke of himself as "ministering (engaged in the *priestly service* of) the gospel of God" and of his "*offering* of the gentiles" as acceptable to God, 15.16. Well, E had been 1<sup>st</sup> fruit offering for Christ from Asia (household Stephanus of Achaia, among very few P himself baptised, 1 Cor 1.16; 16.15. In all likelihood Epaenetus had been (and probably still was) prominent in one of the churches. Clement = Apostles "appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be overseers and deacons to them that should believe", 42. Altogether consistent with principle of "not a novice (new convert)", 1 Tim.3.6 (overseers) - lest lifted up pride, fall same condemnation as devil.

As study photograph, spot **married couple who provide outstanding example of courage.** Their names are **Prisca** (known informally to friends as Priscilla) and **Aquila**, 3. Paul and they had much in common. They shared the same nationality, trade, faith and service - "my helpers/fellow-workers" he labels them. Paul first met some 6 or 7 years before following edict of Emperor Claudius, expelling all Jews from Rome. This result of Jewish riots probably following introduction of gospel into Jewish community there. Claudius was now dead, his edict revoked, the Jewish community flourished in Rome once more, and A/P had returned. Paul and they had worked together as tentmakers at Corinth and Ephesus; indeed they accompanied him from C>E, Acts 18.18-19. This possibly explain his words in Acts 20, "these hands (extended) have ministered to (provided for) my necessities, and for those who were with me", Acts 20.34 = darkened by handling rough Cilician cloth. Ephesian elders recognise.

Not only co-workers *with* Paul, but had risked their very lives *for* him. Metaphorically had "placed their neck" on the executioner's block under the axe/sword. Hazarded lives for his sake; exact circumstances not known but more than likely at Ephesus, where clear very rough time, "fought with wild beasts", 1 Cor 15.32; "pressed/burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired (be without a way; at a loss) even of life", 2 Cor 1.8. Yes, the mighty Paul. Take encouragement. For act of courage which not only Paul himself but the gentile churches generally were extremely grateful. Interest in Rome may well stemmed from contact with A/P. Certainly, first time state intention visit = at Ephesus about 2 years before; planned ("purposed in spirit") go to Jer, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome", Acts 19.21. A/P were with Paul at time [1 Cor 16.19; Ephesus going to Macedonia, vv 5,8 with Acts 20.1). Still in diary. Shortly before his execution at Rome some 8 years later, Paul sent his greetings to A/P, then living at Ephesus, 1 Tim.1.3; 2 Tim.4.19. Only individuals to whom then send them. Fitting that one of last messages he ever sent (4 verses) was to this fine couple, who had gone through so much with him and for him. They were good friends.

Cannot miss fact that many in the group photograph **excelled in their activity for the Lord.** **Urbanus** is afforded same honour as A/P in being described as a "helper/co-worker" (cf "work-fellow" {same Greek} of Timothy, 21) in the service of Christ, 9. But has to be said that it is the womenfolk who carry off the highest awards. The word "labour" in Romans 16 translates the strongest word Greek language possess for toil and effort. It means to give the job absolutely everything you have got, to work until weary, to toil to the point of exhaustion. And each of the four Christians of which Paul used it was a lady. There are **Tryphena and Tryphosa**, 12. Thought by some to be twins, because not uncommon give to twins names derived same root. Their names come from word mean "to live luxuriously"; Paul bear record that were those "who toil laboriously". I can imagine Paul's eye twinkling as dictate this

particular greeting to Tertius, 22 (Latin name; perhaps explain why know saints at Rome personally) - and a smile brought to many faces at Rome when letter read publicly. In one sense, it was a contradiction in terms. For the testimony he gave them was the very opposite of what their names suggested. "You may be called 'Delicate' and 'Dainty' (and were!) but you certainly don't live up to your names - for you both work flat out, like Trojans, for sake of Christ".

Alongside them stand two other, somewhat older, ladies. They are **Mary**, 6, and **Persis**, 12. We note that were two features which distinguished their labour and service. First, the addition of the word "much". In terms of labour, they had excelled even Try/Try. Second, we note the use of the past tense. This suggests that both were now advanced in years; their days of toil were over. But, though their labour may be past, it had not been forgotten - not by Paul, nor, more important still, by the Lord Himself, for labour is never in vain in Lord, 1 Cor.15.58. Note in passing that describe Persis, 12, as "the" beloved, and not as "my" beloved, which used of the three brethren in vv 5,8,9. Possibly careful, circumspect and tactful when speak of sister, or simply that she specially beloved by all.

But we cannot leave these ladies without drawing attention to a fifth. She is another **ageing lady**, seen standing next to a man young enough to be her son - and that is what he is. His name is Rufus, 13. We cannot be absolutely certain, but all the evidence points to this lady as being the widow of Simon of Cyrene. Simon is portrayed by Mark in his gospel as the father of Alexander and Rufus, Mark 15.21. There is a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> century tradition that Mark's gospel comprises the memoirs of Peter, permanently recorded by Mark for benefit of churches of Rome. (Use of several Greek words derived from Latin consistent.) As Mark identified Simon by the names of his sons, can assume sons well known to readers of gospel; ie at Rome. If identification correct, she widow of man who, passing by as came in from country, been impressed by Roman authorities into service, and found himself carrying the Saviour's cross. Could hardly been overjoyed at time but later how must have treasured the privilege! Rufus, her son, is distinguished by epithet "chosen, eminent" in the Lord. He was something special; he was "choice". Clearly an outstanding Christian. J B Phillips paraphrases "That splendid Christian". Me? And the dear lady herself? Paul speaks of her in most affectionate of terms. Sometime, somewhere. somehow she had played the part of mother to him. No way knowing reaction of his family when converted. Not unlikely be disowned and cast out. (Nephew later sympathetic.) [Seen hospitality defined as art of making guests feel at home when wish they were.] Do everything make *him* feel at home in *her* home. Imagine put arms round and ..... "I regard her not only as Rufus' mother but as mine too". A wonderful lady.

Then, we notice a man whose worn features tell us that he has **weathered many storms** in his life. His name is **Apelles**; to his name Paul adds simply, "approved in Christ",10. We know nothing of the circumstances, but clearly this man has faced severe trials in the cause of Christ. He has been tried like some precious metal in a crucible and, having patiently endured the testing, he has won the approval both of his brethren and of the Lord. We honour you, Apelles.

As hold the **picture a little further away**, we struck by many differences between its subjects; the 26 characters certainly form a very mixed group. There were **Jews and Greeks**. Going by their names the majority of the 26 mentioned were Greeks. But at least four of the men (Aquila, Andronicus, Junias and Herodion; last three = kinsmen) were Jews, and probably Priscilla and Mary were Jewesses. There were **slaves and freemen**. Thirteen of the names mentioned occur in inscriptions or documents concerned with the imperial household; for the most part, they were common slave names. Probably those of "households" of Aristobulus, 10, and Narcissus, 11, were slaves. Just possibly to be identified with Aristobulus, the grandson of Herod the Great. Lived and died at Rome as private citizen; friend of Emperor Claudius. Household naturally be known "H of A". When died, his household, although now united with imperial household, would continued to bear name. Narcissus possibly well-known freedman who had great influence with Claudius, executed shortly after Nero's accession 3-4 years before letter written. Again, his slaves became property of Emperor. Possibly therefore all now in imperial household but, if so, owned a different "Lord" to that of Caesar; confess, 10.9. Yet some at least of friends were freemen; such, for example, as the tradesman Aquila. There were **male and female**; at least 7 of the 26 were women.

Certainly a mixed group; Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female. Significantly, in one of his earlier letters Paul wrote concerning the blessings of the gospel, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus", Gal.3.28. Three consecutive benedictions of Synagogue Prayer Book, which tradition ascribes/attributes to Men of the Great Synagogue (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC) = "Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a heathen/ a slave/ a woman". Converted Pharisee. Drive one of Freddie's trucks through. And his smattering of friends in the churches of Rome were living proof of the truth of that statement.

Twice in his letter, Paul had used the expression, "there is no difference". It applied to bond/free and to male/female as well as to Jew/Greek. **First**, "There is no difference, for all have sinned", 3.22. Paul's friends had all discovered for themselves that whatever their religious, social and natural background, all were guilty, all were under power of sin, and all needed saved from His wrath. **Second**, "there is no difference, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'", 10.12-13; may meant lot to Andronicus and Junias, Acts 2.21. Three of Paul's friends (Epaenetus, 5, Amplias (Ampliatius), 8, and Stachys, 9) are specifically described in chapter 16 as "beloved" by Paul. No doubt they appreciate this expression of his affection but in chapter 1 point to something far more important even than this. All saints addressed were "beloved of God". How wonderful to know that "God commends love towards us in that while sinners Christ died", 5.8. This is the love which is poured into our hearts by His Spirit, 5.5. End chapter 8, Paul able assure all believers that absolutely nothing able separate them from the boundless love of God and Christ.

Goes without saying, no way saints of Rome able send Christian greetings to us. And yet they each have something to say to us. Imagine little bubbles come out of each mouth. What would they say to us?

**Andronicus and Junias.** Can trust Christian message- can vouch for historical basis. We were there from the beginning. **Be confident.**

**Aquila and Prisca.** Times call for sacrifice; involve real cost. **Be courageous.**

**Tryphema/Tryphosa/Mary/Persis.** "Labour not in vain in Lord". **Be industrious.**

**Rufus and mother.** Paul "less than least saints", "Inasmuch as done least - ". **Be caring.**

**Apelles.** When going is rough, hold on, go on and win through. **Be steadfast.**

**Whole group together chorus.** All one in Christ Jesus. **Be united.** (Even if not see eye to eye over matters of conscience such as days and meat.)

And the sequel? About three years after, Paul realised his ambition - although not quite in the manner he expected. He arrived at Rome, albeit as a prisoner of Caesar. Had prayed that would have a "prosperous" (good) journey, 1.10; I have no way of knowing whether regarded swimming part of the way as constituting a "good" journey! As he was escorted northwards by a centurion and his men along Via Appia, the saints at Rome heard of his approach and trekked out to meet him "as far as" places 30-40 miles south of city, Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns, Acts 28.15. When he saw them, his face lit up. The man who in his letter spoke of thanking God for the report of their faith, 1.8, stopped to thank God for the sight of their faces, and took encouragement. What great friends.

Just a few years later again the churches of Rome took the full brunt of the persecution launched by Nero. Many of the believers perished. Possibly *some of the 26* went to the lions in the arena or the stake in Nero's gardens. But Paul's letter survived, as witness fact have today. The many allusions made by Clement some 30 years later suggest highly valued by churches of Rome. We finish with the note of triumph from the end of ch 8, which those who suffered must have treasured at the time ... 8.35-39.

NB Nereus, 15. Just over 30 years later, event sent shockwaves through city of Rome. Two of most distinguished citizens condemned as Christians. Husband and wife, Flavius Clemens and Domitilla. He = Consul of Rome and she = grand-daughter of emperor Vespasian and niece of ruling emperor Domitian. Two sons were designated heirs of Domitian. He executed; she banished isle of Pontia. (Cf John to Patmos.) Name of chamberlain was Nereus. Just possible something do with conversion.

Interesting, tomb discovered south of village on eastern slope of Kidron valley at Jerusalem. Side of 1 of 11 ossuaries (receptacle bones of dead) = "Alexander, son of Simon". On lid "Alexander" and word which scholars believe is Aramaic for Cyrene. Possibly Alexander settle in Jer, while mother gone to live with other son Rufus at Rome.

