

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Greetings to Five More People of Note

By Dan Trygg

“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is a first-fruit to Christ from Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Romans 16:3-7

There are 28 people mentioned by Paul in the first sixteen verses of this chapter. We already discussed Phoebe, who was probably sent by Paul to carry his letter to the church in Rome. Next is **“Prisca and Aquila”**. ***Paul met them when he first arrived in Corinth*** (Acts 18:2). “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.” By best historical reckoning, this decree was made in 49 A.D. So, Aquila and Priscilla had *just* recently come from Rome, about the same time Paul arrived in Corinth. **Since they were Jews, and were of the same trade as Paul, they joined together, at least for business reasons at first.** We do not know if they were already Christians, or if they came to Christ due to Paul’s influence. What is quite noticeable, however, is that, aside from this first time we are introduced to them, where Aquila is named first (It was the common practice to introduce couples by the name of the husband first.), ***virtually every other time we come upon them in the remainder of the NT, Priscilla is named first*** (18:18,26; 2 Tim. 4:19 – The exception is 1 Cor. 16:9, where Paul includes greetings from them as a couple to the Corinthian church while writing from Ephesus.). **This is a break from customary protocol, ...only explicable if she were the most vocal and influential of the two.** Not only did Paul live with them, during his stay at Corinth, but **they went with him to Ephesus, at the end of his second missionary journey, and Paul left them in charge of the fledgling church there.** While there, **they clarified some misperceptions that Apollos, an eloquent Jew from Alexandria, had about Jesus.** He was preaching about Jesus, but only knew what John the Baptist had proclaimed about Him. It is *Priscilla* and Aquila who took him aside, and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:24-26). **Now, in Romans 16, we see that they are back in Rome, and they have a church meeting in their home.** Later on, at the conclusion of Paul’s life, **they are back in Ephesus, again** (2 Tim. 4:19). Being free, and merchants, they had the independence and legal liberty to move about within the Roman Empire of those days. Aquila is described as a “native of Pontus”, which is at the southern end of the Black Sea. His name was the family name of the commander of a legion. The name means, “eagle”, the emblem of the Roman army. Prisca is the name of females of a well-known Roman family, the Acilian line. The name is associated with a neighborhood to the southwest of Rome, half-way to Ostia, the seaport, certainly more of a suburban, wealthier area in NT times. Priscilla is the diminutive form, ...more of a familiar, friendly nickname. If this name connection is accurate, this would explain why she would have been educated and more outspoken. **At a time when women were often subjugated by males in Roman society, Aquila and Priscilla model a marriage of mutual respect, where Priscilla was recognized for her gifts, and given the freedom both to learn and to teach. Together they made an effective team, hosting home-meetings, teaching and discipling other believers in the faith.** Paul referred to them as his “fellow laborers in Christ”.

Then, Paul gave out a greeting to Epaphroditus, whom he refers to as “the one beloved by me” and “a first-fruit of Asia unto Christ” (vs. 5). From the record in Acts 18:19,20, Paul had stopped only briefly at Ephesus, speaking and discussing or reasoning with the Jews there. They wanted him to stay longer, but he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem, ...so he went on, leaving Priscilla and Aquila there. Ephesus was the capital of Asia, so it could be that Epaphroditus was an early convert of that brief interaction, or of the ministry of Paul’s friends. In any case, **his conversion went back to those most early days in Ephesus, and now he is in Rome with Priscilla and Aquila. This is a clear sign of the impact that they had had upon his life.**

Next, on Paul’s mind is Mary. We do not know anything about this particular Mary, except that she “labored much toward you”. The name was a common Jewish name, ...probably *not* referring to Jesus’ mother, here. **She was a Jewess in Rome who “worked-to-exhaustion many-times” for them. Paul was impressed by her strong, consistent effort on behalf of the believers there, and thought it important to acknowledge her publicly by name.** Giving recognition for hard work and valiant effort was an important part of “building up one another”, as Paul exemplified, here.

“Greet **Andronicus and Junia**, my fellow-kinsfolk and fellow-prisoners. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were also in Christ before me” (vs. 7). Here are two more that Paul knew were in Rome, and felt it important to greet them. **What we know of them is that they were “relatives”, or possibly of the same heritage.**

(The word translated as “relatives” or “kinsfolk” literally means “of joint kind”. Usually it was used for someone related by blood, but it could also refer to someone of the same race, or even of a close companion.) **They also had been imprisoned for their faith. The term may even imply that they had “done time together with” Paul. They also were apostolic.** There is some debate about the nature of their “apostleship”. Being an “apostle” was clearly *not* limited to the eleven disciples of Jesus and Paul. Barnabas is called an apostle (Acts 14:14). Epaphroditus is called an “apostle” from the Philippian church (2:25), just as Titus and the brothers accompanying him are referred to as “apostles” of the churches sending them (2 Cor. 8:23). Timothy and Erastus were “sent” (i.e., as apostles, ...the verbal form of “apostle”) by Paul into Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Clearly, **being an apostle could be simply a functional term, literally meaning “sent one”**. As such, it would refer to being a delegate, representative or ambassador for someone else. **Or, it could refer to a spiritual gift, an unusual empowering and commissioning of the Holy Spirit** that “sends out” the person as a representative of Christ (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; cf. Acts 13:1,2). Usually an apostolic ministry should be accompanied by “the signs and wonders of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12), as an authentication of God’s call and active Presence. **What is said about Andronicus and Junia is that they were “outstanding” among the apostles.** The Greek word implies that they were “well known, famous, ‘well-marked’, or prominent” in their ministry. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, in the last part of the 4th century, was a native Greek-speaking scholar and well-known preacher. It was his opinion that this term meant that they were well known, prominent and respected as apostles. **Finally, they had been followers of Christ longer than Paul himself had been.** That brings them back to some of the earliest days of the church, ...maybe even to the church in Jerusalem. They may have been in on the “ground floor”, so to speak, ...having come to Christ in those first years of the Christian movement.

The thing that really stands out about these names is that Junia is a woman’s name. Andronicus and Junia could have been a married couple, like Aquila and Priscilla, ...or they may have been brother and sister. In either case, they seem to be linked together as a pair. In fact, **until the 12th century, the church fathers universally understood Junia to be a woman’s name.** In the thirteenth century, under Pope Boniface VIII, there was a strong agenda to minimize the role of women in the church. **Bishop Giles (1243-1316), an apologist for the Pope, offered the suggestion that the name here was really a form of a man’s name, “Junias.”** It was too much to think that a woman could be an apostle, in the minds of the scholastic monks who proffered this theory. Note that **this was entirely based upon bias and conjecture. There was absolutely NO textual or historical evidence to suggest that this was the case.** This was presented as an explanatory comment to explain the difficulty of what *looked like* a woman’s name in this verse.

As far as the actual textual evidence, a survey of all the collections of scriptures, including translations into other languages from the earliest times, throughout church history indicates that Junia remained a female name, and was referred to as an apostle, until 1858, when Alford’s *Greek New Testament* changed it to a male name, ...with no notation, citation or justification whatsoever. Other Greek texts continued to support the original reading of Junia, until 1927, when Nestle’s edition of the Greek NT followed Alford’s work. Nestle’s and Alford’s texts became the standard texts used in most modern Greek studies. The change Alford introduced has crept into some of our modern English translations, notably the NASB, the Message, the Living Bible. **The reason for this change can be summed up by citing one scholar as an example: J.B. Lightfoot.** In his notes on this text, he said that “Junia” *must* really be “Junias” (a supposedly male name) because Paul called him/her an apostle and “only men can be apostles.” That statement was written at the end of the 1800’s. Lightfoot was a well-respected Bible and linguistic scholar, but one who was blinded by his bias in this area. At *that* time, archaeology was still an infant discipline, and the number of ancient texts was relatively small. **Now, however, we have thousands of ancient manuscripts and fragments going back to the earliest days of the Christian movement.** Eldon Epp, President of the Society of Biblical Literature surveyed these texts and found that **(1.) Junia was a very common Latin name for a woman,** and found three instances of it in Greek literature, as well. **(2.) There were NO instances of a Junias as a man’s name, at all.** Furthermore, the masculine form would be “Junianas”. That name occurs frequently in secular literature of the time. **Thus, there is NO TEXTUAL BASIS for believing that the name in Romans 16:7 was anything other than Junia, a woman’s name.**

Paul, of course, knew the reality of who Andronicus and Junia were. They were from the same background, maybe even the same family line. **They had been through difficult things, both together and apart, serving the same Master as His representatives.** Paul saw them as his “elders”, at least in terms of the longevity of their faith. By calling them “outstanding among the apostles”, he may even be acknowledging their superiority in terms of their spiritual depth and maturity.

In spite of how some people misperceive Paul, he certainly did NOT minimize women. He saw them as valuable co-workers, worthy of acknowledgement, recognition and praise for their efforts. **He clearly stated that in Christ, there was no “male or female” but we are all “one in Christ Jesus** (Gal. 3:28). That would seem to indicate that he believed God *could* and *would* choose *any one* for any role or gifting He pleased.