

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org

Multiple Meetings

By Dan Trygg

“Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.”⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are the ones of Aristobulus.¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”

Romans 16:8-16

There are more than 22 people directly referred to by Paul, here. Let’s take a closer look at these names to see if we can learn any more about them.

“**Ampliatus**” was a common name for that time, and was associated with the Imperial household. Apparently, he and Paul were good friends, because he referred to him as “my beloved in the Lord”.

Next, is “**Urbanus**”, whose name was a common slave name, also found in association with the Imperial household. It is from a Latin adjective (*urbs*), meaning “city-bred”. Paul referred to him as “our fellow-worker in Christ”. Note this refers to the entire group, not just Paul.

“**Stachys**” was a Greek name, meaning “head of grain” (Matt. 12:1). It was fairly rare, but also was associated with the Imperial household. Stachys was another good friend, being referred to as “my beloved”.

“**Apellēs**” was a common Jewish name. He was described as “tested-and-approved” (Gk. – *dokimon*).

“**The ones of Aristobulus**”. Aristobulus was a grandson of Herod the Great, and a friend of Emperor Claudius. Having died, his household was absorbed into the Imperial household, but still bore his name.

“**Herodian, my kinsman**”. The name indicates that this man was somehow related to the household of Herod. If the word “kinsman” means “relative” (it is the same term as used in vs. 7), it would mean that Paul had connections to Herod’s family, somehow. It could also mean “fellow-countryman”.

“**the ones out from Narcissus, the ones being in the Lord**”. Narcissus had been the personal secretary of Emperor Claudius. Because of his position, he gained great wealth through receiving bribes. When Claudius was murdered, Narcissus was also put to death by Empress Agrippina, the mother of Nero. His property was confiscated and his household was absorbed into the Emperor’s. Note the distinction: Greet the ones “being in the Lord”. Paul knew that only some of the household had been following Jesus.

“**Tryphaena and Tryphosa**, the ones laboring-hard in the Lord”. These are undoubtedly sisters, possibly even twins. Their names are from the same root word, meaning “to live a delicate, soft, luxurious life”. Thus, their names could be rendered as something like “Dainty” and “Delicate”. These two women were born into the privileged upper class, yet they became noteworthy for their “hard, difficult, physically-strenuous work in the Lord.”

“Greet **Persis** the beloved who labored-hard many-times in the Lord.” There are some interesting insights in this brief phrase. Persis is a Greek word for “Persian woman”. To maintain decorum, Paul refers to her as “THE beloved”, instead of “MY beloved” as he had with Epaphroditus, Ampliatus, or Stachys. Why? Because she was a woman, and Paul did not want there to be any confusion or misunderstanding. The name “Persis” can mean to “take by storm”, which fits with the intense labors she had given herself to perform. The past tense could mean either a reference to past labors that Paul was personally aware of, or the reality that she can no longer do this hard work. Nevertheless, her strenuous efforts for Christ were significant, appreciated, and worth recounting.

“**Rufus**, a choice man in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” “Rufus” was a common slave name, meaning “red”. Many scholars think that this could be the Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21, especially since Mark’s gospel was probably written to the Christians in Rome: “They forced a man coming in from the country, who was passing by, to carry Jesus’ cross. He was Simon, a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus.” There is a warmth and familiarity in Paul’s reference to this man and his mother. Obviously, he knew them well, and was very close to them. Cyrene was in northern Africa, where Libya is today. If this connection is accurate, then Paul was very close to the family of the man who had carried Jesus’ cross! Remember, the Christian movement was only 27 years old, and those original participants would have been well known to many who traveled to Palestine. Now they are in Rome.

“**Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers** who are with them.” These are all male Greek names. None stands out in any special way. Author/pastor Ray Stedman thinks that they may have been

young male business men who had come to Christ and formed a group. They seem to have been the core of a house church, and maybe even lived together in a discipleship house. Note that there were other “brothers” besides them.

“Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.”

Again, this appears to be the core of a home church. **Philologus and Julia** are linked together, possibly because they were married. The name “Philologus” means “lover of the word”. This could be a Christian nickname, much like Joseph the Levite was known as “Barnabus”, which means “son of encouragement”, because that was his gift, his function in the church (Acts 4:36). Philologus could be a pastor/teacher in the group. The name “Julia” was the commonest name for female slaves in the Imperial household, from the time of Julius Caesar on. The name, “**Nereus**”, is recorded in connection with a married couple who were tried and condemned for their faith in 95 A.D. Flavius Clemens, Consul of Rome, was condemned to death, and his wife, Domatilla (niece of Domitian, the reigning emperor, and granddaughter of Emperor Vespasian) was exiled and her husband was executed for their allegiance to Christ. Their housekeeper was a “Nereus”, ...possibly the one named here? Could he be the one who led them to the Lord? We know nothing of Nereus’ unnamed sister, or of Olympas, or the others, except that they seem to be a home church.

As we look over this list of names, this offers an insightful glimpse into the communities of believers in Rome. Again, Paul had never been to Rome, yet he either knew these people directly, or he had heard of them and decided to acknowledge them by name. We have little understanding of the complexities of the Imperial household. **Some of those connected with the Emperor’s household were freedmen, and some of them were quite wealthy. Others were slaves.** Many were born into slavery and that was their status for life. Being a slave in a setting like the Emperor’s household meant that you were a domestic servant, of some kind or another. **There were also native Romans, Jews, and immigrants from other parts of the Empire in the list of those Paul greets.** This reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the Roman Empire of the first century. Roman roads and Roman Peace (*Pax Romana*) meant that **Rome and her provinces were open for business, and significant numbers of people traveled from place to place. This is the only way Paul could have met most of these people he had become close to in his list.** They must have been living in another part of the Empire, where Paul also was. Ampliatus and Stachys would seem to fit this scenario, and possibly Persis. Because of their Jewish background, Herodias, Rufus, and some of the “ones of Aristobulus” may possibly have had connection with Paul when he was living in Judea, or through family connections.

As we look over the listing of names, it is apparent that **the church in Rome consisted of numerous informal, clandestine gatherings of believers. Christian meetings had infiltrated every strata of Roman society,** although most of the names indicate **the strongest representation was among those who were slaves.** It is amazing, that just 27 years after Jesus’ resurrection, and the birth of the church, that the Christian movement had reached significantly into even the Imperial household, on several fronts!

Some other observations: **(1.) Since meetings were in homes, it was often the case that couples served together in hosting and/or leading meetings.** Here, in Romans 16, we see three couples: Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia, and Philologus and Julia. **(2.) We see other relatives working together to serve or build up the Body of Christ:** Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Rufus and his mother, Nereus and his sister. **(3.) We also see people from other natural connections or common life circumstances working together and influencing each other for Christ:** the “households” of Aristobulus or of Narcissus; the intentional gathering of young, single, immigrant businessmen into supportive relationships, possibly including a home church or maybe even a discipleship house; the number of slaves living and working together within the Imperial household. **(4.) We see both men and women recognized for their ministry work for Christ.** In a time when often the contributions of women were largely ignored by the Roman and Jewish cultures, Paul’s listing of names here includes 9 women out of the 27 names (fully one third!) and two are described as recognized leaders: one, Phoebe, is called a “deacon” and “leader”, and the other, Junia, an “apostle”. In addition, however, four other women are acknowledged for their “hard work” for Christ. **(5.) We see men and women from many backgrounds, ...racial, ethnic, of every class and socio-economic standing..., united together in Christ to help one another grow in faith and serve God. (6.) At this time, churches were “believer’s meetings”. They were not open to the public.** You had to be invited to come by someone who was already part of the group. **Groups were small, intimate gatherings. People got to know one another.** How do you think it was possible for Paul to name so many people? They were *more than* acquaintances. They were people he had shared his life and heart with, as they did with him.

Finally, Paul exhorted them to greet one another with a holy kiss. This was the customary way of greeting one another at the time. These were kisses on the cheek, and were not suggestive in any way. It would be like shaking hands, in our culture, ...or a hug of greeting. These relationships in the Body of Christ were precious. They were not to be taken for granted, but to be warmly acknowledged as brother and sister, ...as people of value, for whom Christ died. **If no one else offered love or acknowledgement, surely the church should be a place where you felt welcomed.**