

Romans

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Romans 16:12-16



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Vs. 12

- This verse is dedicated to the sanctity of hard work. The word Paul uses here is "kopian", which means to work to the point of exhaustion. Paul used the same word in vs. 6 when referring to Mary. But here in vs.12 are 3 more people who are really dedicated hard workers for the Lord and His church.
- The first two are likely twin sisters, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Paul may have been enjoying the irony here as he used the word kopian to describe them, because their names respectively mean dainty and delicate! It's like Paul is saying that "Your mother may have named you dainty and delicate, but you are anything but!!"
- Persis, or Persia, is another woman who is an extremely hard worker in the Lord. Cynics often try to paint the New Testament and Christianity in general as anti-woman, but how many women is Paul praising in this single chapter? And it seems that these three are known to him only by reputation. Remember, when he met Prisca and Aquila when they arrived from Rome in Corinth, surely Paul asked them about how the Roman church was doing and how was it growing so well and they told them of many things, including of these amazing hard working women!

Vs. 13

- This verse is all about Rufus, who was a "choice man" or a "chosen man" in the Lord. But the truth about Rufus may actually lie in the Gospel of Mark.
- In Mark 15:21 we are in the story where Jesus is struggling to carry His cross. "And they compelled a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to carry His cross." Now again, like the story in Mark where the young man escapes and runs off naked into the night, why would Mark add who Simon's sons are unless the reference had an additional meaning? First, we need to remember who Mark was originally writing his gospel for: the church in Rome. The tradition has always been that Mark came to Rome with Timothy (2 Timothy 4:11) and was still in Rome both when Paul died and Peter arrived and sat down with Peter to get his story of Jesus which became Mark's gospel. So the answer as to why he would bother to mention Alexander and Rufus as children in his story of Christ's crucifixion must be because the church in Rome, his primary audience, would know them.
- There's a great Easter song entitled, "Watch the Lamb" where a pilgrim to Jerusalem is there with his two sons and their job is to watch the lamb they have brought to sacrifice. But then their dad is summoned to carry the cross of Jesus and the experience is so powerful that the father realizes that Jesus is the Lamb of God. By the end of the song he is urging his boys to look at the cross and "watch the Lamb". Surely the actual Simon had to have a similar kind of experience! How could you be with Jesus and carry his cross to Calvary and **NOT** be affected?
- But what about Simon's wife, the mother of Rufus, who was so close to Paul that she was like a mother to him? Where and how did such a relationship come to be? Again, we're connecting the dots a bit, but go back to Acts 11:19-20 where we are told that "...those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and **Cyrene**, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks as well, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus." And where was Simon from? Cyrene. So suppose that Simon and his family never went back to Cyrene but stayed with the church there in Jerusalem after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:6 tells us that the resurrected Jesus "appeared to more than 500 of the brethren at one time". Was Simon one of the 500? He watched Jesus die. Did he also see Him alive after the tomb was empty? And did he and his family stay in Jerusalem until the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7-8)? And when they left, was he one of those men of Cyrene who went to Antioch

speaking Jesus to the Greeks? And had he so established his home and family in Antioch that when Barnabas brought Paul there, they opened their home to Paul, so that the mother of Rufus became a mother to Paul to whole time they were in Antioch together? And was it Mark's Alexander, Rufus' brother, we find in Acts 19:33, who stood with Paul against the mob in Ephesus?

Vs. 14

- Of Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas we know nothing. All five are Greek names. There was a Hermas who wrote "The Shepherd" which was the first classic Christian story, but it seems to have come from a later generation.
- Perhaps Paul here is feeling that he may get in trouble for leaving someone out, so he tries to make a blanket statement, "and the brothers and sisters with them". Or perhaps Paul has heard these five are leading successful house churches, so "greet all the brothers and sisters with them".

Vs. 15

- The same idea applies here, that a couple named Philologus and Julia perhaps lead a house church and as well as "Nereus and his sister" and a fellow named Olympas".
- But Nereus may have quite a story. Recall from our study of vs. 8 and Ampliatus. This was a common slave name and yet in the Roman catacombs is the Cemetery of Domatilla where a very elaborate tomb is found with the single name of a slave: Ampliatus. Here then is the story as told by William Barclay:
- In A.D. 95 an event occurred which shocked Rome. Two of the most distinguished people in the city were condemned for being Christians. They were Flavius Clemens, who had been consul of Rome, and his wife Domatilla, who was of royal blood. She was the granddaughter of Vespasian, a former Emperor, and the niece of Domitian, the reigning Emperor. In fact, the two sons of Flavius Clemens and Domatilla had been designated Domitian's successors in the imperial power. Flavius was executed and Domatilla was banished to the island of Pontia where years afterwards Paula saw the cave where "she drew out a long martyrdom for the Christian name." The point is this--the name of the chamberlain of Flavius and Domatilla was Nereus. Is it possible that Nereus the slave had something to do with the making into Christians of Flavius Clemens the ex-consul and Domatilla the princess of the royal blood? It may be an idle speculation, for Nereus is a common name, but, on the other hand, it may be true. There is one other fact of interest to add to this story. Flavius Clemens was the son of Flavius Sabinus, who had been Nero's city prefect when Nero sadistically persecuted the Christians after charging them with being responsible for the appalling fire which devastated Rome in A.D. 64. As city prefect Flavius Sabinus must have been Nero's executive officer in that persecution. It was then that Nero ordered the Christians to be rolled in pitch and set alight to form living torches for his gardens, to be sewn into the skins of wild beasts and flung to savage hunting dogs, to be shut up in ships which were sunk in the Tiber. Is it possible that thirty years before he died for Christ, the young Flavius Clemens had seen the dauntless courage of the martyrs and wondered what made men able to die like that?

Vs. 16

- Greet one another. Salute one another...with a **HOLY** kiss. Greet one another with affection, but greet with a chaste kiss, the kind of kiss you give family at holidays, the kind of kiss that you would kiss the cheek of Christ with.
- "All the churches of Christ greet you." The entire Christian world greets the church of Rome. Again, Paul is painfully aware of how vital and influential the Roman church was. Every church in the Christian world had its eye on the church in Rome. It was so very important that they set the right example, speak the right message, and live the right life...the Life of Christ to which they were called.