

46. Who's who

March 29, 2009

If you've been going through the Bible like I do each year or just reading it in your devotional time, you have noticed that at the end of each writer's letter in the New Testament, you would find all these names. In most cases, we can not only pronounce all those weird names, but also we are not interested in why they are there.

Isn't it common for Bible teachers, pastors, including me, to skip those portions of the Bible? When was the last time you heard a sermon on the significance of the list of nations in Genesis chapter 10 or on the wall builders families' names in Nehemiah chapter 3 or even on the genealogy of Christ in Matthew chapter 1? Most likely, never.

At the end of chapter 15, apostle Paul said, "*Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen.*" It sounds like he finished his long letter. Don't hold your breath. After all, he is a preacher, a long winded preacher. Here in chapter 16, Paul greets at least 26 people by name, as well as two unnamed believers. Then he also greets several churches that meet at their homes. These are apostle Paul's "Who's who" list.

With this chapter, we can see what kind of person our apostle Paul was. He was not only a soul winner for Jesus Christ, but also a friend maker. He didn't mind being known as a friend of slaves like his Master and Lord Jesus didn't mind being known as a friend of sinners.

To many of us, these names are not important unless our names are in it, right? Don't say, "No." To prove my point, let me ask you this: if we take a group photo of our church congregation and give that photo to everyone of you, whom are you going to look for first? Yourself. These names may not be important to us, but they were important to Paul and our God enough to include in the Bible just like all the born-again believers' names in the Lamb's Book of Life.

A. OUR SISTER PHOEBE

Romans 16:1-2 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cencrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Many Bible scholars believe that Phoebe delivered this letter to the Romans for apostle Paul.

Paul uses the Greek word 'diakonos' for 'servant' here. We get the word 'deacon.' Some commentaries say that she was a deaconess in the church at Cencrea. In my humble opinion, I believe that she was a wife of a deacon in that church, not holding an office of a deacon. Some of you ladies might think, "Are you a male chauvinist pig?" No, I am not. Many of you ladies know better. I am coming to this conclusion because of the Word of God. Let me show it to you.

1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

It does not say, "A wife of one husband." I don't care what some Bible scholars think. The Word of God has the final authority, period.

B. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

Romans 16:3-5a Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

Priscilla and Aquila were a Jewish husband and wife team who were mentioned in Acts 18. Due to the persecution by the Roman emperor against the Jews in A.D. 49, they moved to Corinth. They became Christians through Paul and later they became helpers to Apollos in Ephesus.

Apparently they were moved back to Rome by the time apostle Paul wrote this. We don't know in what occasion they risked their lives to help and protect apostle Paul, but we are glad that they did. They were great people to open their hearts and their home to have a church there.

As a matter of fact, our church started at the home of one of our congregation and had a period of time where we had our Midweek service at another family's home.

It is so sad that the quality and authenticity of a church often is evaluated by the building they occupy. One of the big size Calvary Chapel pastors said, "If you meet at home with less than 50 people, that is not a church. It is a home Bible study," at one of the Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors' Conferences. The next speaker rebuked his stupid remark publically. He deserved it.

There are many churches around the world have beautiful buildings, yet many of them have nothing to do with following and declaring Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. You may have seen big empty dead churches in Europe. You might even be able to name several so-called mega churches in America that have a form of godliness, but deny its power.

The church is not a building that contains the people of God. It is the people who love Jesus, obey what He teaches them and declares to others what He commands us. That is what the real church is. So don't think our church is any less than other churches that have beautiful buildings.

C. GREET THESE GODLY PEOPLE

Romans 16:5b-16 Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are 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. The churches of Christ greet you.

These are the mixture of Jews, Gentiles, rich and poor, free and slaves, male and females. Aristobulus most likely was the grandson of Herod the Great and a friend

of the Emperor Claudius. Narcissus, too, was a rich and famous personality who held a great deal of influence in the emperor's palace.

Among these names of Rome's elite there also were those who occupied the lowest class of society. Amplias, Urbanus, Hermes, Philologus and Julia were common names for slaves. Yet Paul gives them just as much honor as everyone else. They are also his fellow workers in Christ, his beloved in the Lord.

D. CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

God never made us to be independent from other people, rather inter-dependent. In ministries, we are supposed to work together. It is a team concept.

If you are using a Bible software to study your Bible, try this, please. See how many times word 'one another' shows up. You will find that it is used 113 times in the New Testament. In apostle Paul's letters alone, he used it 48 times.

When was the last time you spend time to get to know the new comers of our church? I am not talking about our greeting time. You really cannot know a person in less than a minute on Sunday morning. You have to take your time and make yourself available to that new comer.

Then you might say, "Why in the world would I do that, preacher? What if that person doesn't like me?" First of all, how would you know if God is going to use you to minister to that person? Second, if you go to that person with a sincere care in your heart, I don't think that person would reject you flat out. However, I do give you a boundary here though. Man ministers to man, lady ministers to lady.

If you operate from the basis of need, you demand from others and become selfish. But if you operate from the basis of supply, you look for ways to help them. It is a wonderful place to be. You don't have to be physically wealthy to be this way. It is a matter of heart and God will supply as you give. In most cases, it requires 'time'.

Some people say, "I am a shy type. I don't make a first attempt to get to know a new person." I say this, "Get over it." If you've been coming to this church for sometime, you know about this church more than they do. Wouldn't it be great for you to introduce that new comers to other people in the congregation to make them feel welcomed? If you take an initiative and serve others, it will start to overflow to others and will make a difference.

E. CHARACTER COUNTS

We didn't study this portion of Scripture just to entertain you with my mispronunciation of these godly people's names. I want you to notice two common denominators among these people:

- 1) Devotion to the Lord and one another
- 2) Godly character

Since we have studied many times about devotion to our God and one another, let's think about having a right and godly character.

Character counts. As a matter of fact, character might be one of the most important things in a person's life. Not just what you say is who you are, but what you do is who you really are.

By the way, if you really want to know what you really are, here is what comes down to. When you are all alone, no one is looking, no one to impress, what you do and what you think is who you truly are.

Character in integrity is defined in this way:

The measure of a person's character is what he would do when he knows that he would never get caught. If I give you a complete fool proof, guaranteed opportunity to commit any sin you want, would you do it? If you do, that is what you really are.

Every one of us, in Christ, has the ability to reject sin. We can resist temptation and choose to live righteously with the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is no secret that the Word of God is under attack today in America. The Ten Commandments are viewed as "offensive and restrictive." Here in Arizona, and across the nation, the Christian worldview is mocked and Jesus Christ is now no longer the most influential person that has ever lived. In fact, according to a recent Harris Poll, Jesus Christ came in second with Barack Obama as first. That is flat out sickening.

All of us know that the truth will not be found in the White House but in God's House. We await the return of our Lord in hope that it may be today, but until then, as believers of Jesus Christ we can not just proclaim the Word of God, but are to be doers of the Word. Jesus commands us to "Go into all the world..." and that world is outside the walls of our church.

When our nation's politicians and judges make decisions to redefine what marriage is and that a child's life can be terminated in the mother's womb, or left to die on it's own once aborted, then we, as Christians, must speak up in defense of the Scriptures.

As you all know even those who claim to be Christians are going right along with the culture and popular opinions than holding onto what is right. Recently, Episcopalian Diocese decided that they would accept a clergyman who also practices buddhism as one of their bishops. An Evangelical Lutheran Church in America task force released recommendations in an effort to change Christian teaching on homosexuality and to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

In this kind of horrible surrounding, if you and I don't have a godly character with a solid devotion to our God and His people, we, too, will be swept away like many.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) When you are all alone, no one is looking, no one to impress, what you do and what you think is who you truly are.

2) There are four things that kill a godly character:

- Self-centeredness
- Distorting the Gospel to serve your agenda
- Appetite for power and possessions
- Immorality