"GOD USES ORDINARY PEOPLE"

(Paul Greets God's Workers)

Romans 16:1-16

1-24-2021

INTRODUCTION:

***Regardless of your talents, God wants to use your life for His glory!**
Whom does God use?

God uses ordinary people like:

I. PHEBE . . .
A Helpful <u>Servant</u> in God's Work (v. 1-2)

II. PRISCILLA & AQUILA . . .
A Couple who <u>Sacrificed</u> for God's Work (v. 3-5a)

III. EPAENETUS & APELLES . . .
Men who were <u>Faithful</u> to God's Work (v. 5, 10)

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Men of Notable <u>Reputation</u> *[Outstanding Testimony]* **(v. 7)**

VI. URBANE . . .
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VII. RUFUS' MOTHER . . .
A <u>Mother to Many</u> in God's Work (v. 13)

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INTRODUCTION:

When we think of prominent Christians or saints of years gone by, we think of Biblical heroes like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, and John.

Or heroic figures recorded in the annals of Christian history like Chrisostum, Martin Luther the Reformer, John Wesley, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, George Whitfield, D. L. Moody, Jonathan Edwards, Billy Sunday, etc.

While all of these men had a unique ministry in the plan of God through the ages, we dare not forget that men like these are only a small representation of the over-all picture.

God has used multitudes more of faithful people whose names have not been inscribed on the pages of our Christian history books, yet who are prominent heroes who occupy special places in Heaven, and will have special rewards for eternity because of their loving, dedicated service for Christ.

When we get to Heaven, I'm sure we will be amazed by the great number of "ordinary" people who, because of their labor for God, will stand out as prominent giants of the faith.

"Greet" = in verses 4-16, the word "aspazomai" (translated "greet", also "salute" [for variety]) occurs a total of 17 times.

Romans contains the longest list of greetings of any Epistle. Again proving Paul's great desire to meet with the Romans and his great love for them (1:11; 15:23).

To "greet" ("salute") means to: pay one's respects to; to welcome. In modern terms - to say "hello to."

In Paul's long list of greetings, we find references to some unsung heroes of the faith -- men and women whose names are not so popular, yet whose lives made an indelible mark for Christ in the local churches in which they served and the societies in which they lived.

***Regardless of your talents, God wants to use your life for His glory!**

Whom does God use?

God uses ordinary people like:

I. PHEBE . . .
A Helpful Servant in God's Work (v. 1-2)

V. 1

"I commend" - lit. I stand with; I recommend.

Letters of commendation were a common practice (Acts 18:27; II Cor. 8:18-24; III Jn. 9, 10)

"A servant" - a "diakonon" (Greek)

NOTE: The word diakonon does not necessarily refer to the office of "deacon," but is used to refer to a servant in the general sense.

EX: Government officials are called diakonos (servants).

Martha was cumbered about with much serving (diakonia) (Luke 10:40).

--All Christians are to do the work of a diakonia (Eph. 4:12; Heb. 6:10).

The word diakonos is used in the technical sense of "deacon" (Acts 6:1-2; I Tim. 3:8) only a few times in Scripture. It is primarily used of a servant in the unofficial sense (Mt. 20:26, 23:11; Jn. 2:5, 9; 12:26; I Cor. 3:5; Eph. 6:21).

This sense of the word is meant by Paul in Rom. 16:1. Therefore it is inappropriate to think of the reference to Phebe as being support for the office of "female deacon."

Cenchrea = the eastern port of Corinth.

V. 2

"Receive her" - Paul appeals to the Romans to welcome Phoebe into their fellowship, just as they would welcome any saint of God. In other words, although she is changing location from Corinth to Rome, she is to be accepted and treated on an equal level (Gk. = axios) as their fellow church members are.

The practice of sending "letters of recommendation" on behalf of people who move from one church to another, finds support from Paul's commendation of Phebe.

"Assist her" - lit. stand by her; i.e. support her, help her.

"Business" = matter

Paul is saying: "Help her in any matter where she may need help."

The reason given as to why the Romans should help Phebe is because she helped other believers, including Paul.

"Succourer" = helper, protector

"The masculine form of the word was used by the Romans for the legal representative of a foreigner.

A "patron" was one in the Greek states who took care of a stranger and was responsible for him to civil authorities" (Thomas, p. 418). (Like someone today who would work with immigration as a "sponsor" for a foreigner).

In Jewish communities it meant the legal representative or wealthy patron. (Reinecker, p. 383).

Phebe, evidently supported Paul, and did whatever she could to advance the work of God with whatever resources she had.

No doubt she was a hospitable woman.

II. PRISCILLA & AQUILA . . .
A Couple who <u>Sacrificed</u> for God's Work (v. 3-5a)

V. 3

Phebe being from Cenchrea (Acts 18:18) and Priscilla and Aquila being from Corinth (Acts 18:2, 26; I Cor. 16:19), apparently all travelled from Corinth to Italy to help the saints of God at the Church of Rome. [NOTE: Aquila was originally from Italy (Acts 18:2)]

"Priscilla and Aquila" - a saved Jewish couple who served Christ as a <u>team</u>. Every time they are mentioned in Scripture, they are together as a husband and wife team (Acts 18:2, 26; I Cor. 16:19; II Tim. 4:19; Ro. 16:3).

"My helpers" = lit. my joint workers, my fellow laborers who work with me.

How did they work with Paul?

1. They assisted God's man in the ministry (Acts 18:2).

   This godly couple together helped Paul by giving him a job (tentmaking) and housing when he went to plant churches in Corinth.

2. The helped disciples immature believers (Acts 18:26)

3. The opened up their home for the Lord's work (I Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5).

V. 4

4. They laid down their necks for Paul's sake.

   They were willing to die; they went so far as to risk their lives in order to protect God's man.

   "Laid down their own necks" = to place one's head under the axe of the executioner (Reinecker, p. 384).

   Exactly how they risked their lives for Paul's sake is not known. One thing is sure - Paul was thankful and so were the Gentile converts who came to Christ because of Paul's ministry.

   I'm sure Paul on many occasions testified to Gentile converts of their great debt to this couple who heroically delivered Paul's life in some way.

   Paul could say to the saved Gentiles: "You would not be saved if it were not for Aquila and Priscilla!"

V. 5

"The church that is in their house" - the early Church did not congregate in Cathedrals with stained glass windows and arched roofs, but in people's homes.

Remember a church is not a building, but is an assembled body of saints gathered together in an orderly fashion for the purpose of worship, fellowship, and edification (with pastors and deacons - Phil. 1:1).

Beware of formalism!

III. EPAENETUS & APELLES . . .
Men who were <u>Faithful</u> to God's Work (v. 5, 10)

V. 5

A. <u>Epaenetus</u>, who is the firstfruits of Achaia"

"Firstfruits of Achaia" - Epaenetus was the first convert to Christ in Achaia (in the province of Asia).

"My well beloved" - There is something special about that first soul you ever lead to Christ; or the first charter members of a church.

It's a thrill to see converts "<u>stick</u>." That is, to not see them fall by the wayside but to remain faithful.

For evangelism to multiply, it only starts with one convert (ILLUS: the many souls that have been won to Christ because of one person. The Gospel spreads, disciples multiply, and the fires of revival spread when there is but a "spark").

No doubt God used Epaenetus to reach many in Asia Minor.

B. "<u>Apelles</u> approved in Christ" -

"Approved" - to approve after testing, to find genuine after examination, to find acceptable after trial.

EX: James 1:3 - "Trying" is same word as "approved."

The word means to prove or show something to be real or genuine after testing it (EX: How gold is tested).

V. 10

We don't know what tests Appelles went through to gain the status of being named "approved," but the point is - He passed the tests!

He was proven to be a genuine, unhypocritical, sincere believer in Christ.

May God find us to be <u>genuine</u>!

IV. MARY, TRYPHENA, TRYPHORA, & PERSIS . . .
Women who Toiled in God's Work (v. 6, 12)

A. Mary (v. 6)

"Bestowed much labor on us" -

"Much labor" = polla ekopiasev (cp. v. 12)

"Labor" = from "kopiao"; to work to the point of exhaustion; to toil till you grow weary; points to the intensity of the work. The word describes hard labor, to the point of sweating.

"Much" - points to the quantity of the work. This Christian woman did not sweat for God once or twice, but many times.

"On us" - points to the objects of the work. She labored for God's people. Whatever you do for Christians, you actually do for Christ (SEE: Mt. 25:34-40)

Servicing God's children is an evidence of salvation (Heb. 6:10) and will not go unrewarded (Mk. 9:41; I Cor. 3:14).

B. Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (v. 12)

"In the Lord" - points to the motive of the work.

The phrase: "in the Lord" - shows that even though these women bestowed labor on God's people, they did it for the Lord's sake.

The work of the Lord must always be done for the Lord.

We are to serve "in the name of Christ" (Col. 3:17, 23 -"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. . . . And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.")

When was the last time you sweat for the Lord's work?

V. ANDRONICUS & JUNIA . . .

Men of Notable <u>Reputation</u> *[Outstanding Testimony]* **(v. 7)**

"Who are of note among the Apostles" -

"Of note" - they were noteworthy, outstanding; they had a splendid reputation, an admirable testimony.

"Among the apostles" - lit. in the apostles' (opinion)

Paul is not teaching that these two men were apostles, but that they had a notable testimony in the eyes of the Apostles.

Why were they <u>notable</u>?

1. They were <u>related</u> to Paul ("My kinsmen" = "my relatives" [cp. v. 11] - either a reference to immediate relationship or to the fact that they were fellow Jews)

*****2. They <u>suffered</u> for Christ like Paul ("My fellow prisoners")

Phil. 1:29 - "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, no only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Mt. 5:11-12 - "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Suffering for Christ is part of the Christian life.

SEE I Peter 4:12-19

*3. They were <u>mature</u> believers

"Who also were in Christ before me" - Adronicus and Junia were saved before Paul was. They became believers and thus were baptized "in Christ" (Rom. 6:1ff) prior to Paul's conversion.

The implication is that they were mature believers. Their spiritual age matched their spiritual maturity.

"A good name" is important! (SEE: Rom. 16:19).

Prov. 22:1 - A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold."

"A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccl. 7:1).

To lose or ruin your testimony is to hurt the cause of Christ

--Eccl. 10:1 - "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour."

EX: David (II Sam. 12:14 - "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast giving great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

EX: Israel (Ezek. 36:20, 23) (Rom. 2:24 - "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.")

VI. URBANE . . .
A Man with a <u>Team Spirit</u> in God's Work (v. 9)

"Urbane our helper" - lit. our <u>fellow</u>-worker ("sunergov"); the one who worked <u>together</u> with us.

Urbane was a man with a "<u>team</u> spirit." (like that of Priscilla and Aquila who are also called "helpers" (lit. fellow-workers, v. 3)

Men like Urbane don't live for vain glory or self-recognition. They don't have to be the sole servants. They don't mind sharing the credit for labor done.

They don't live for the limelight to be upon them. The Urbane's tend to work behind the scenes. They don't clamor for attention. They are "people oriented," who can function in conjunction with others.

Today, we need fewer "chiefs" and more "indians." Fewer foremen and more common laborers. Fewer captains and more soldiers.

VII. RUFUS' MOTHER . . .

A Mother to Many in God's Work (v. 13)

"Chosen" = elected. Rufus was chosen in Christ like the above-mentioned people.

The word "chosen" points to the fact that he was a believer.

Everyone who believes, has been chosen (II Thes. 2:13 - "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.")

"His mother and mine" - Although she was not Paul's physical mother, Rufus' mother was like a mother to Paul (cp. Mark. 10:30).

She is the mother of Rufus by birth, and the mother of the Apostle Paul by Christian love (Thom, p. 425).

Being as a mother to Paul, she probably prayed for him, cooked special meals for him, did special tasks for him; and encouraged him.

Every good church has the "motherly" types of women. We need more Godly women with this affectionate quality.

There are some ladies in this church that I know care for me like a son. They also take under their wing and care for others in our church. These ladies are teachers to the younger women (Titus 2:3-5) and are burden bearers.

[NOTE: This woman's son could be the same Rufus who helped bear the cross of Christ - Mk. 15:21. If so, he no doubt gained this virtue from his mother.]

CONCLUSION:

V. 16

"An holy kiss" -

"Holy" - set apart from impurity and sin

"Kiss - lit. an expression of affection.

God wants us to express our affection for each other in a manner that is not offensive or sinful.

Different cultures express friendship in different ways: Italians hug; Americans shake hands; Eskimos rub noses; and Jews kiss on the cheek. How ever you express your heart-felt affection for other believers, make sure they know you genuinely care for them. Beware of being cold, formal, stand-off-ish, and distant.

Who does God use for His work? Ordinary people. . . various people . . . and diverse people (cp. I Cor. 12:4-5, 12-27).

God uses ordinary <u>laymen</u>!

God uses <u>men</u> and <u>women</u>!

God uses <u>various</u> <u>abilities</u> (talents, skills, etc.)

What God is looking for today is <u>willing servants</u>.

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not" (II Cor. 8:12).

He will accept whatever you have to offer Him.

Closing Hymn - "A Tender Heart" (Praises book)