

Inclusive Leadership in a Challenging Culture

Thomas Robinson, *Gifts for Spiritual Leadership* 3, March 4, 2018

Romans 16:1-13

¹ I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a servant/minister/deacon (*diakonos*) of the assembly in Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and be at her disposal in whatever matter she may need, for she has been a steward/patron of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet **Prisca** and **Aquila**, my fellow laborers in Messiah Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, for whom not only I give thanks but also all the assemblies of the Gentiles. ⁵ Greet also the assembly in their house.

Greet my beloved **Epaenetus**, who is Roman Asia's first-fruit for the Messiah. ⁶ Greet **Mary**, who has labored strenuously in many ways for you.

⁷ Greet **Andronicus** and **Junia**, my kinsmen who spent time in prison with me. They are especially notable among the emissaries/apostles, and they were in the Messiah before me.

⁸ Greet **Ampliatius**, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet **Urbanus**, our fellow laborer in the Messiah, and my beloved **Stachys**. ¹⁰ Greet **Apelles**, who has been put to the test in the Messiah. Greet those from the household of **Aristobulus**. ¹¹ Greet **Herodion**, my kinsman. Greet those from the household of **Narcissus** who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, who both have labored strenuously in the Lord. Greet the beloved **Persis**, who has strenuously labored in many ways in the Lord.

¹³ Greet **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord; also **his mother** – and **mine!**

Galatians 3:25-29

²⁵ But now that faith has arrived, we are no longer under a caretaker. ²⁶ For you are all “sons of God,” through the faithfulness embodied in Messiah Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah. ²⁸ There's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are the Messiah's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs just as God promised.

John 4:16-19

¹⁶ Jesus said to [the Samaritan woman], “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I don't have a husband.” Jesus said to her, “You're right in saying, ‘I don't have a husband’; ¹⁸ for you've had five husbands, and the one you have now isn't your husband. What you've said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”

1 Timothy 5:9-10

⁹ Let a widow be selected/enrolled (*katalegein*) when she has reached at least sixty years old, wife of one husband, ¹⁰ testified to by good works, if she has nourished children, if she has welcomed strangers, if she has washed feet of holy ones, if she has gone to the aid of those suffering, if she has followed as a disciple in every good work.

Matthew 23:8-11

⁸ But you, don't be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. ⁹ And don't designate a father on earth, for you have one heavenly Father. ¹⁰ And don't be called instructors, because you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant (*diakonos*).

Colossians 4:12-18

¹² Epaphras, greets you. He's one of your own, a slave of Messiah Jesus, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you stand mature and fully assured in all God's intentions. ¹³ For I'm his witness that he has put in hard labor for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the assembly in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the assembly of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry (*diakonia*) you have received in the Lord." ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

A Community that Broke Barriers

Last week we talked about how 1 Tim. 3 showed how Paul urged Timothy to discern leaders that fit the distinct situation, life, and needs of the congregation. Remarkably, in its first cent. the Jesus movement struggled to be inclusive on every level. Success was real but limited. There were no patterns of associations with women or slaves as leaders. It was hard in that society for them even to speak, much less serve as prophet-teachers or leaders. But they were pushed by the Spirit giving gifts, by theology/baptism, by Jesus' example. Jesus treated every person as honored, valuable (paradigm of Samaritan woman // Nicodemus). The Spirit came to all (Act 2) and gave gifts as he willed (1Cor 12:11), not staying in lines. The deep reality expressed by baptism broke down the most fundamental barriers to make believers one in Christ. How could they live that truth in such a divided, hierarchical society?

Calling and Service

They found ways to do it. They did not emphasize titles and offices. Yes, there were commonly used terms that developed: emissary/apostle; "the 12," prophets, teachers, stewards, shepherds, servers (*diakonos*), overseers (*episkopos*), proclaimers of good news, etc. But none of these was fixed. People were called into service, or found their roles/gifts, etc. In later times a hierarchical structure was followed: patriarchs, bishops, priests, etc. Everything about the society pushed against the inclusive function and leadership that was built into the identity of these assemblies by their theology and by Jesus himself.

A Community on the Move – Looking at their Pictures

Rom 16 is a list of greetings to people Paul knows and has worked with who are now in Rome. It doesn't seem planned except as a letter of recommendation for Phoebe, carrying the letter. But it gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of Paul's letters and Acts. A mobile church.

We get hints from the greetings and names. Phoebe, a Gk name, an independent woman, traveling missionary, "deacon," a steward/patron of Paul and many others.

Prisca & Aquila (Gk.&Lat.). Jews from Pontus, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Ephesus.

Craftspeople, taught Apollos, risked life for Paul. Leaders for assemblies among Gentiles.

Strenuous Work: P&A, Mary (Heb.) worked hard for Rome, Urban (Lat.slave name), Tryphaina & Tryphosa (Dainty & Luscious) but strenuous workers. Persis (Gk slave name).

Beloved or Jewish kin. Epainetus (1st in Ephesus), Ampliatus (slave name), Stachys (slave name), Herodion, (Jewish), Andronicus & Junia (Gk.&Lat.) Jewish, early believers, notable emissaries/apostles, imprisoned with Paul (in Ephesus?).

Unnamed mother of Rufus. (Mk 15:21 – Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus). Likely the same. North Africa. Now Simon's wife is alone. What story? Paul calls her my mother.

Men/women, Jews/Gentiles, slave/free: laboring strenuously with a vision of this new reality!