

A Model Church!
Romans 16:1-27
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Marriage is like a Mirror

Marriage is like a mirror. A husband or wife discover things about themselves they would never learn on their own: strengths & weaknesses, graces & sins are all exposed.

For believers marriage becomes an opportunity for sanctification, to put on, by the Spirit's power, the graces we lack and to repent of the sins we discover. I remember hearing a Christian man tell how a prolonged illness gave him an opportunity to repent of things he had seen in the marriage mirror for many years, but had failed to repent of.

But where can churches go to discover how they are doing? Where are the mirrors which could help us see ourselves as a community? Some people might say "go to the mega churches around the world and compare yourself with them: Grace Community Church, Hillsong, Redeemer." No, the mirrors every church should hold up before us are the apostolic churches of the New Testament which are held up as models:

The church at Thessalonica is one of those: "you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thessalonians 1:7)

And so is the church at Rome: "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." (15:14)

This morning, God helping us, we're going to compare ourselves to five noble graces found in the church at Rome. I suggest we use these five, not as sticks to beat ourselves up with should we fail, but as aspirations to aim for with God's help.

We're in the last chapter this morning, chapter 16 where Paul sends his greetings, his "hello" to friends in the church at Rome, 26 named friends and others along with them. And through this long list of greetings we discover five church graces which every Christian church should aspire to.

(1) A loving church

Paul's love for the church is very clear:

"my dear friend Epenetus" (v.5)

"Ampliatius, whom I love in the Lord." (v.8)

"my dear friend Stachys" (v.9)

"my dear friend Persis." (12)

But so does the church's love for one another shine through in the way they serve one another - in the NT, love is revealed by actions: *"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."* (1 John 3:18)

Look at the way these Roman Christians serve one another:

- *"Mary works very hard for you."* (v.6)
- *"Tryphena and Tryphosa work hard in the Lord"* (12)
- *Persis works very hard in the Lord.*(12)

Love is demonstrated in service of all kinds!

I do not believe there is a greater observational test of a church than their love for one another:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
(John 13:34-35)

Tertullian, a Christian writer at the end of the second century noted how outsiders would remark,

"Look," they say, "how Christians love one another" (for they themselves hate each other); "and how they are ready to die for each other" (for they themselves are readier to kill each other.)"

Paul urges the church to demonstrate their love with a Holy Kiss: "Greet one another with a holy kiss?" in verse 16? Five times in the NT, this command appears: here, in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 13, 1 Thessalonians 5, and 1 Peter 5:14.

What are we to do with this command? We cannot just discard it! At the very least, the NT Scriptures are urging us to outwardly demonstrate our love for one another: whether that's with a verbal greeting, a handshake, fist pump, or even a holy kiss. (I remember an older sister up north who took these verses seriously and when she came into a home group she'd go around everyone and give them a Holy Kiss on the cheek! It was sweet!)

You can't hold a grudge against someone for long if you have to greet them, "hello", shake their hands or give them a holy kiss! I am not encouraging an outbreak of Holy Kissing in the refreshment hall, but we are called to show our love for one another demonstrably.

The second characteristic of the church at Rome was this: it was a welcoming church..

(2) A welcoming church

...we know that because the people Paul lists are diverse:

Men and women, Paul greets 9 women and 17 men. There are folks from different ethnic backgrounds: Gentiles and Jews. People from different stratas of secular society: there's Priscilla and Aquilla who probably owned their own tent-making business and whose house was big enough to host the church, and many slaves—someone who has studied these names in detail says that over 50% of the names are those given to slaves.

There is something deficient with a church made up on one type of person, one class, one nationality, one age group; and something heaven-like about a church made up of all-sorts of folk: "After this I looked and there before me was a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... crying out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God" (Revelation 7:9-10)

(3) A complimentary church

A church where women as well as men serve God together in the roles God has allocated to each. Paul really emphasizes the ministry of sisters in the church at Rome! I have wondered whether his almost-bias towards sisters was intended to balance a prejudice against women in the city of Rome and perhaps among some Christians in the church at Rome? I don't know.

- Paul has **entrusted this very important letter to Phoebe!** She could be traveling from one of the ports of Corinth to Rome on business. Some 800 miles journey by land and sea. And he wants them to know that she is a deacon in here church. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea" She has helped many people, Paul says.
- Then there is **Priscilla**, wife of Aquila, whose name often appears before her husband's name in the NT (v.3), both fellow-workers of Paul.
- The only people who Paul calls **hard workers** are the women, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa and Persis (v.12)
- If Junias of verse 7 is a woman she is commended alongside her husband as outstanding among the apostles (that's not capital A apostles, who were all men, but small a apostles—the word apostle means "sent one", Fiona and Evair are apostles, we might say).
- Then there's the **mother of Rufus**, says Paul in verse 13, "who has been a mother to me, too." Every single bloke—Paul was single! - needs someone to mother them, right?! "Paul buy some new clothes," or "get a haircut, my son!!"

The sad tendency of men in history—even sometimes in the church—has been to neglect women. In our day, perhaps to compensate for this defect, women are given roles that go beyond Scripture.

Somewhere in the middle is to be found the God-honouring, Scripture affirming roles that God has given women to play in the church.

(4) An outward looking church

The Christians at Rome aren't narrowly focussed on their own concerns in their city, but were outward looking.

- Paul expects them to give visitor Phoebe all she needs, which would have included hospitality, no doubt, “ I ask you to receive her in the Lord an a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you..” (2)
- A number of the people in Rome have helped Paul in mission: Pricilla and Aquilia were his fellow-workers who had even risked their lives for Paul in his missionary endeavours (4). It was a risky business working with Paul! Andronicus and Junia had been imprisoned (v.7). Urbanus had helped Paul in Gospel ministry (9)
- Paul assumes his friends will be interested in his mission travels—hence all the details he gave in chapter 15
- and he assumes they will be pleased to hear greetings from all the churches in Christ, v.16.

An outward looking church!

I was told that somewhere in the world, is a church building which has windows purposefully facing upwards but not windows facing sideways. It was there way of saying, “we're not really interested in the world around us, only in ourselves and God.” But that, brothers and sisters, is an attitude unknown in the Bible! From Genesis 12 onwards, when God chose Abraham, it was his desire that the whole world hear the Good news. Jesus commands us “Go make disciples of all nations..”

And finally;

5. A Christ-centred church

Right throughout Paul's greetings he says how these folks are connected to Christ, “in the Lord,” “in Christ Jesus”, “Chosen in the Lord.” Jesus Christ is the centre of their corporate life together. When it says in verses 12 that “Tryphena and Tryphosa work hard **in the Lord.**” it means:

- Their ***motive for serving*** is Christ's love for them
- Their ***power to serve*** comes from Christ, he is the vine and they are the branches
- Their ***purpose in serving*** is to glorify him, not to gain personal fame or prominence

A Christ-centred church is a church where:

- Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the Head
- Where his Word is preached and obeyed
- His name is lifted up in song
- His Gospel joyfully proclaimed
- And his eternal kingdom extended

Conclusion

Trustpilot has five stars, right? I wonder what the true and only Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Prophet, Priest and King, would give us today?

We have many weaknesses, we have so much further to go.

We thank him for his grace thus far and ask him to purify us and make us: more loving, more welcoming, more encouraging towards our sisters, more outward-looking and more Christ centred.

Amen