

Romans XXii

Introduction

At OCC we should always open our arms to welcome anyone who wishes to learn about Jesus Christ. We should emphasize the good story of Jesus Christ (gospel in old English) and we should try to engage with people but should never be so seeker friendly that we water down or deny our theology. We need to try to be organized and have the best management and use latest technology but never to become just an organization with a cross stuck on the building. If OCC is to be a place where people matter then OCC needs to be like a family, in which older people in age and maturity train and encourage the younger people, where everyone is accountable and people find security, acceptance, hope and help. It must be a place where words are reliable, worship is meaningful, faith is invincible, grace is evident, and love is tangible. We need to try to be a warm and welcoming body.

Paul was deeply concerned about people and relationships were very important to Him. Throughout this book we find this scarlet thread of love.

Romans 5:5 *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts.*

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 8:28-39 teaches us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Romans 12:9-10 We are to devote ourselves to loving one another; *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*

Romans chapter 13 we are to love those outside the church family.

Romans chapter 15 we are to love other believers more than we do our own comfort. Paul considered love crucial because he valued people above all else.

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This final chapter is very important. These people named in chapter 16 are precious to Paul. It was extremely unusual for so many people to be personally named in a letter but Paul wanted to make sure that they knew that neither distance or time has diminished his love or them; he had not forgotten them, he loved them.

Romans 16:1-2 *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 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.* Phoebe was a deaconess in the city of Cenchrea which was 7 miles east of Corinth. The Greek word here for servant is *diakonos* the feminine meaning of deacon. Paul commended her, which meant he had sent her with his personal endorsement. This was a common courtesy given to someone delivering a letter. Paul selected Phoebe for this very important mission and thought very highly of her.

Romans 16:3-4 *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.* Paul first met this couple on his second missionary journey. They had fled their home in Rome under the persecution of Claudius. God used that event to put them in contact with Paul, Acts 18:1-3 *After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.* They shared the same trade in tent making as Paul and he had a profound influence on them. They travelled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus, where they remained for a number of years working along side Paul.

The church in Ephesus became Paul's base of operations in Asia Minor into the surrounding regions. The couple's home became a meeting place for worship and instruction, 1 Corinthians 16:19. Paul stated that he owed his life to them, as they had put aside their own safety for his sake.

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When Claudius was murdered by his wife then Priscilla and Aquila couple returned back to Rome. They provided mature leadership for the growing church in Rome and no doubt used their house for a safe place for Christians to gather.

There are reasons in our journey of life that God sends people across our path.

Romans 16:5 *Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epapnetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.* Epapnetus was one of the first converts to Christ.

Romans 16:6-7 *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.* Mary was a Jewish woman who worked hard for the ministry. Andronicus and Junia were fellow Jews, and had been imprisoned with Paul at some previous time; they were Christians before Paul.

Romans 16:8-15 *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.* The next twenty names offer little information. Paul used terms such as beloved, fellow workers, approved in Christ, workers in the Lord. Each one brought to mind a special relationship the apostle valued and shared in common with the church in Rome.

Romans 16:16 *Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.* After commending Phoebe and greeting his many friends Paul

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encouraged them to greet each other with a holy kiss. This was an Eastern custom, especially amongst the Jews; a public symbol of unity and acceptance.

For OCC it doesn't really matter if it is a kiss, a hug or a handshake, if we are united in love this should feel a natural symbol of unity and acceptance.

The A,B,C,D of love within the body of Christ.

Acccept one another; accept variety. We are a community of Christians of varying stages of growth and are growing at different rates. We have people who have been in the church all their life and those who are discovering what church life is all about.

Become a servant. Churches work best when we serve one another. Find something that needs doing or someone who needs help. You can always ask – what can I do to help? Real servants aren't picky about what they do.

Cultivate esteem for others. Show people value or worth. Show people they are appreciated. Show people appreciated.

Demonstrate our love. Find ways to demonstrate our love through acts of kindness.

If this is the kind of church you want to be part – why don't you take the lead: be the first. Become an authentic example.