

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Although Paul had never traveled to Rome, he knew quite a few saints who were serving there. You may remember Prisca (also named Priscilla) and Aquila, a wife and husband whom Paul mentions today (16:3). We first read about them in Acts when Paul first visited Corinth. They were Jews who had been forced to leave Rome under the edict of Claudius (Acts 18:2-3). As Paul temporarily worked with them making tents, he led them to the Lord, and they hosted a church in their house (1 Cor. 16:19). When Paul departed from Corinth many months later, they went with him (Acts 18:18). They were the ones who in Ephesus led Apollos to a more accurate understanding of the Messiah (Acts 18:24-26).

After Claudius died, his successor, Nero, permitted all Jews to return to Rome, which is what Prisca and Aquila apparently did, and there is little doubt that they were building God's kingdom there.

I've mentioned all of this history about Prisca and Aquila for a reason. I suspect that, as they were forced into exile from Rome, they were not happy campers. But years later, looking back at how God had used their circumstances to bring them in contact with Paul, and more importantly, with the gospel that he preached, I'm sure they thanked God for their previous "misfortune." How true it is that what we cry about today is often what we rejoice about tomorrow! If you are facing trials, keep your eyes open for the silver lining. And start rejoicing even before you see it!

Note that Paul sends his greetings to "Prisca and Aquila," not "Aquila and Prisca" (16:3), putting wife before husband. This is the same order in which they are twice mentioned by Luke (Acts 18:18, 26), and in another letter by Paul (2 Tim. 4:19). Such an order was not necessarily the cultural custom, as the reverse order is also used by Luke and Paul elsewhere (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor. 16:19). Husbands, how would you feel if someone addressed you and your wife by using your wife's name first?

Since I'm broaching this delicate subject, I might as well not conceal the fact that Paul lists at least ten women within these Roman greetings, five of whom he declares are workers for the Lord. One is an apostle named Junias (or Junia), and scholars debate if it is a masculine or feminine name, although the feminine is preferred. Imagine that!

Those who want to keep women in their "proper" place in the church prefer that we not read this chapter at all, especially in light of the fact that Paul begins it by commending to the Roman believers a woman from across the Aegean Sea. He calls her "our sister Phoebe...a servant of the church," and he instructs them to "receive her...in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well" (16:1-2). She may well have carried Paul's letter to the Romans. Thank God for all the female servants in Christ's body!

Incidentally, Andronicus and Junias are 2 apostles who are named among about 24 people who are listed as apostles in the New Testament. God called more than 12 to the office of "sent one." The world needs them more than ever.

Take note of Paul's admonition to turn away from those "who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching" which they had learned (16:17). These false teachers cannot only be identified by their spurious doctrine, but by their unholy lifestyles. They are not, Paul says, "slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ," as are all true believers. Rather, they are slaves "of their own appetites" and are characterized by "smooth and flattering speech" by which they "deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" (16:18).

Run from any "minister" whose life is not characterized by obedience to Christ's commandments! The true gospel results in the "obedience of faith" (16:26).