

Romans 16:21-23 Serving the Lord in the ways He has gifted us

Romans 16:21-23 lists various greetings to the believers in Rome from colleagues of Paul who were based in Corinth. We can know that these seven people were totally committed to serving Christ (Romans 12:1), yet they were very different from each other, and were gifted in very different ways.

There are various places in Paul's letters where he gives a list of gifts. One of these is in Romans 12, the gifts being, prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation (encouragement), giving, leading and showing mercy (see also Ephesians 4, 1Corinthians 12). None of Paul's lists is a complete list. If there had been a set of gifts known to the Apostles we would expect Paul's lists to all be the same, but they are not. We should treat the lists as suggestive not comprehensive. For example, Paul doesn't mention the gift of musicianship.

Many of the gifts sound like characteristics all Christians should have, such as serving, or encouragement. This is true, but some people excel in a particular area. For example, some people are just natural encouragers because they are specially gifted in that area.

As we study the lives of the individuals in Romans 16:21-23 we can see they were very different, yet they all used the gifts God had given them to serve Him.

Timothy (Romans 16:21) is given the honour of being Paul's *fellow worker*. He was a significant leader in the early church, and we can imagine there were few who hadn't heard of Timothy. We have heard of Timothy because Paul wrote two letters to him (1&2Timothy), which became part of the New Testament. Paul had a special mentoring kind of relationship with Timothy, calling him, *my true son in the faith* (1Timothy 1:2). By all accounts Timothy was especially gifted. Paul said of Timothy, *I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 2:20). Timothy was a pastor. His mother and grandmother had been highly influential in his early years (2Timoth 1:5), especially in teaching him the Scriptures (2Timothy 3:15). Jewish education was thorough, starting on Leviticus at the age of 5years! Timothy's knowledge of the Scriptures must have helped him enormously to know the Christ of Scripture and to become to man he was. Likewise, the best thing we can do for our children is to teach them the Scriptures, and the Christ of Scripture.

Lucius (Romans 16:21) could have been Luke who wrote Luke-Acts. But many think this unlikely since Luke is traditionally Gentile, and this Lucius was one of Paul's *kinsmen* (fellow Jew). There was however a Lucius at the church in Antioch, who was one of the prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). He is mentioned here as *Lucius of Cyrene*, so he was African. Lucius (and Luke) means *luminous*. If they are the same Lucius, he was using his gifts of preaching and teaching to spread the light of Christ.

Jason (Romans 16:21) lived in Thessalonica and is mentioned in the book of Acts (Acts 17:5-7). Paul and Silas came to preach the gospel in Thessalonica, and many Gentile God-fearers responded. The Jews became jealous, and instigated a riot. Jason was hiding Paul and Silas. The rioters attacked Jason's house and Jason was arrested. But in the meanwhile Paul and Silas managed to escape. Although we cannot tell what Jason's gifts were from this passage, we can see that his bravery played a key role in protecting Paul so his ministry could continue.

Sosipater (Romans 16:21) was probably Sopater the Berean, another companion of Paul (Acts 20:4). It may well be that Sosipater was present when Paul preached the gospel in Berea. He could well

have been one of those who *received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so* (Acts 17:11). Likewise, we need to be Berean Christians!

According to tradition (Catholic tradition) Sosipater and Jason later preached the gospel in Corfu, and *built up the Church in Corfu until a very old age, when they gave up their souls to God*.¹ Who knows what you will be doing in 10 years time!

Tertius (Romans 16:22) was gifted as a scribe. He wrote the letter of Romans while Paul dictated. In Paul's day most letters were written by a professional scribe. Tertius as a professional would have had the necessary material for writing, and the vellum or parchment. Although we know almost nothing about Tertius, he must have been very skilled to have coped with such a challenging work such as Romans. The work of the scribe required precision, skill and much attention to detail. Tertius wasn't as far as we know a preacher, but had gifts in other areas.

Gaius (Romans 16:23) is noted for his gift of hospitality. He is most likely the same Gaius mentioned in 3John because here John describes such a man: *Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God* (3John 1:5-6).

Erastus (Romans 16:23) was the city treasurer in Corinth. He was gifted with numbers. As city treasurer he would have been a man of influence, and based in Corinth for much of his life. But he was also involved in mission work with Paul at least for a while (Acts 19:22, 2Timothy 4:20).

Quartus (Romans 16:23) is addressed as *the brother Quartus*. May be there was another Quartus who wasn't a brother, or who had a bad reputation! Quartus means *fourth*. It was common for the Romans to name their children after numbers. Tertius means *third*! There are many men called Primus and Secundus in Roman literature. The birth name of Caesar Augustus was Octavius, meaning Eighth. According to tradition, Quartus became bishop of Beirut and converted many to Christ, and suffered martyrdom. If this is true, Quartus was a gifted evangelist.

All these men were serving the Lord in the way God had gifted them. As we know church isn't a one man band, but is built up in love *as each part does it's work* (Ephesians 4:16). We are not meant to hide our gifts under a bushel (Matthew 5:15), or hide them in the ground (Matthew 25:25). Yet it can be difficult to know how to serve the Lord and use our gifts for Him. For me the change came when I started looking to the Lord instead of to other people to show me how He wanted me to serve Him. The Lord said to Moses, *What is that in your hand?* (Exodus 4:2-3). Rather than comparing ourselves with others, or getting frustrated, we should start with what God has already given us. We should *throw it on the ground*, not literally, but start using it, and see what God does with it. We may think we only have a little to give. But the boy who gave away his picnic had only 5 small fish and 2 loaves of bread. Yet in the hands of Jesus it was multiplied beyond imagination ... when he gave it away! (Matthew 14:21). Talking and praying with someone else about using our gifts for God can help. But the important thing isn't so much our ability as our availability. The men in our verses all made themselves available to Christ, and he used them in different ways. As the Apostle said, *having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them* (Romans 12:6).

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_of_Thessalonica