

The Hall of Faith

When the Roll is Called Up Yonder – Part III

Romans 16:5b-16

Introduction

Webster defined “fame” as “the state of being well known or much talked about”.¹

It can be for something good or for something bad. Fame has to do with being remembered.

I like the way one anonymous writer put it when he wrote, “You will know that you are truly famous when a crazy person imagines he is you.”

The truth is, the desire to be remembered is something every person has, to one degree or another, whether it is to be remembered by your company, or your peers, or your classmates, or your parents, or even by your children who are away at college and you hope will remember to call you (I do not why that one came to mind!). None of us want to be forgotten, at least while we are alive, right?

I can still remember being sent to the corner of my third grade classroom. While I was back there serving my sentence, I took out my penknife and carved tiny initials into the block wall – vowing my teacher and school would remember me. They evidently did not.

Just before the Civil War, a wealthy farmer named Worthy Taylor hired a young man named James to do his chores for the summer. James milked the cows and chopped the kindling and slept in the hayloft, but was able to eat with the family. Over the course of the summer, he fell in love with Taylor’s daughter. He eventually, asked for her hand in marriage. This prosperous farmer replied, “C’mon, you have no money and no prospects. You’re an ordinary farm hand. I can’t let you marry my daughter!”

When the summer ended, James packed his little bag and disappeared forever. The years passed and in that time, Worthy Taylor prospered even more. He decided to tear down his old barn and build a new one on the same site. In the process of doing so, he discovered that James had carved his full name into one of the rafters over the hayloft where he had slept that summer thirty-five years earlier – James A. Garfield, who, at that very moment, was the President of the United States.

Without a doubt, while in that hayloft, James said, “I will be remembered.”

The desire to be remembered and have the facts to back up the reason anyone should ever remember, as well as the desire to remember others worth remembering is the human impetus behind the “hall of fame”. The question is, which hall of fame?

If you research the subject, you will discover that the hall of fame that comes to your mind is probably the hall of fame related to something or someone you care about. In my research, I came across one hall of fame after another. For example:

- The National Soccer Hall of Fame;
- The National Baseball Hall of Fame;
- The National Basketball Hall of Fame – one for men and one for women;
- The National Hockey Hall of Fame;
- The National Hall of Fame for – Boxing, College Football, Swimming, Bowling, Volleyball, Distance Running, Wrestling, Golf, and Bicycling.

There are others to remember and honor:

- The U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame;
- The American Nurses Hall of Fame;
- The National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame;
- The National Aviation Hall of Fame;
- The Kennedy Astronaut Hall of Fame;
- The Quilter’s Hall of Fame – housed in Maria Webster’s historic home.

There are also:

- The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame;
- The Country Music Hall of Fame;
- The Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

I discovered that there is even The Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame.

Some of you guys are thinking, “As well there should be!”

I came across The Advertising Slogan Hall of Fame, as well. Three of the winners in 2002 were:

- “Finger Lickin’ Good” – KFC;
- “Let Your Fingers Do the Walking” – The Yellow Pages;
- “Have It Your Way” – Burger King;
- “The Ultimate Driving Machine” – BMW (actually it is an F150, but BMW is in denial).

In my research I found:

- The National Toy Hall of Fame;
- The National Inventor’s Hall of Fame;
- The Science and Technology Hall of Fame;
- The Teachers Hall of Fame.

I even found The International Clown Hall of Fame – with Red Skelton as the first official inductee.

Then I came across The Jewish American Hall of Fame, where I paused in my reading long enough to note some of the names:

- Irving Berlin;
- Harry Houdini;
- Albert Einstein.

One special inductee into The Jewish American Hall of Fame that caught my eye was Uriah Levy, who died in 1862. He believed that Thomas Jefferson was a great man for molding a Republic where men could worship any way they wanted to

worship. It was ten years after Thomas Jefferson died that Uriah Levy purchased Jefferson’s run down estate that was virtually in ruin. He poured money and time into renovating and restoring it, and even purchased an additional 2,000 acres around the home site. When Uriah Levy died, his will directed that the property, known as Monticello, be left to the people of the United States. He wanted to preserve the house and property of Thomas Jefferson, and so far, it seems he did.

When we arrive at Romans chapter 16, we discover nothing less than a microcosm of God’s Hall of Fame. We could call it The Hall of Faithful Servants. One name after another was inducted into this esteemed Hall of Faith, however, for different reasons than the world would ever recognize.

The Spirit of God prompted His servant Paul to recognize several dozen people, thus immortalizing their names. This was not because they were brilliant or strong or funny or talented or creative, but because they sought to preserve the house, the property, the possession of God – His church which was purchased by the blood of His Son.

So Paul names one after another – most are of common stock, some are noble, some are slaves. Their names are carved into the pages of scripture with barely more than their initials. There may only be a comment or two, but it is enough to teach deep, profound, and encouraging truths to us all. Let us rejoin our study through this Hall of Faithful Servants.

You might notice that one phrase keeps coming up in Romans 16. It appeared in Romans 16:2 as the phrase,

... *in the Lord* ...

It appears again:

- *in Christ Jesus* (verse 3);
- *in Christ* (verse 7);
- *in the Lord* (verse 8);
- *in Christ* (verse 10);
- *in the Lord* (verse 11);
- *in the Lord* (verse 12);
- *in the Lord* (verse 13).

These people are worth remembering because they are in the family of faith, first and foremost. They were citizens of Rome, but belonged to Jesus Christ. Their sphere of life was not Rome, but Christ.

The book of Romans began by showing us men and women living in condemnation; the last chapter shows us individuals living in Christ.ⁱⁱ

The Hall of Faith

Now, let us pick our study up in Romans 16 and look at the faithful servants who were inducted into The Hall of Faith.

Epaenetus (Romans 16:5b)

Notice the last half of Romans 16:5,

. . . Greet Epaenetus (Επαινετος), my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

There were thousands of converts to Christ in Asia – in cities such as Philadelphia, Colossae, Pergamos, and Ephesus. However, Paul remembered the very first person who told him, “I will accept this Jesus as my Savior and my Lord. I do believe that He has risen from the dead and is the very Son of God. I accept His sacrifice alone as payment for the guilt of my sin.”

Επαινετος was the first – and perhaps it was the irony of God’s providence that this man’s name would mean “praiseworthy”. Without a doubt, this man would signal the gospel reception which would bring praise to God from the lips of millions of believers the world over, who would discover in Christ their redemption and give Him praise.

Epaenetus would be the first, but he was only the beginning.

Mary (Romans 16:6)

Paul continues in Romans 16:6, to say,

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

We do not know exactly which Mary this was. There are at least five Marys mentioned in the New Testament:

- Mary, the mother of the Lord;
- Mary Magdalene;
- Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus;
- Mary, the wife of Clopas;
- Mary, the mother of John Mark – who wrote the Gospel account.

Now this believer in Rome is mentioned. Whoever she happened to be, she was a tireless worker who may very well have been worn out.

The word Paul used, “kopiaw,” can be translated, “worn out; to grow weary; to work with great effort”.ⁱⁱⁱ

The same word was used by John the apostle, in John 4:6, when he wrote,

Jesus was wearied from His journey, and was sitting by the well. (Paraphrased)

Jesus was weary – the same verb was used.

It is the same word used by Peter after the Lord told him and the others with him, to drop their nets one more time into the water to catch some fish. Peter responded,

“Master, we haven’t caught anything all night even though we have worked hard.” (Luke 5:5 Paraphrased)

Again, the same Greek verb is used for “worked hard” that Paul used in Romans 16:6.

We do not know anything about Mary except that she received her induction into the Hall of the Faithful, not because she accomplished some great deed – in fact, we are not even told what she did – but because, as we are only told, she worked hard at doing it.

The verb refers to physical exertion – she came early and left late. Perhaps she set up, cleaned up and then locked up.

The spirit and pluck and determination of Mary is behind most things that happen in church – even 2,000 years later.

Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7)

Paul goes on in Romans 16:7, to say,

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who were in Christ before me.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine if the name of the second person mentioned in this verse is masculine or feminine. The word “Jounia” is used in the accusative singular form (Jounian), and can be either the female name, Junia, or a contracted form of the male name Junias.

Some believe they are husband and wife, while others believe they are an evangelistic team.

We do know four things about them, based on the information Paul wrote. If we work back through the words in the text, Paul said they,

- “*were in Christ before me*”; that is, they were saved some time before Paul was saved;
- “*are outstanding among the apostles*”; using the term “apostle” generically.

Barnabas, in fact, was called an apostle in Acts 14:4, even though he was not considered part of the twelve apostles. The office of apostle was closed by this time; its time had come and gone.

The generic usage of the word occurs to refer to faithful evangelists/missionaries. The Greek word “apostolos” simply means, “sent one or commissioned messenger”. This could refer to anyone sent or commissioned by the church to unreached places; to modern day missionaries or evangelists.

This was either a husband and wife missionary team or a couple of men who formed a missionary team and advanced the gospel. In fact, Paul wrote that they were outstanding! They excelled in their ministry.

Paul continues to say of Andronicus and Junias that it was not always easy, as he calls them,

- “*my fellow prisoners*”; literally, “war captives or even prisoners of war”.

Since the apostle Paul spent a lot of time in jail, it is impossible to know which prison term they shared with him. However, they had a special bond that evidently developed while spending time together in a cell. These men knew it was nothing less than war and thus, Paul would refer to them as his fellow prisoners of war. Paul never forgot them.

Paul also said that they were,

- “*my kinsmen*”; probably a reference to the fact that they were Jews – perhaps from his own tribe of Benjamin.

Ampliatius (Romans 16:8)

Paul writes in Romans 16:8,

Greet Ampliatius (Αμπλιατος), my beloved in the Lord.

The word “beloved” first appears in the Greek translation of Genesis 22. Abraham was told by the Lord to go and sacrifice,

. . . your son, your only son, whom you love . . . (Genesis 22:2)

This is the same word that came from heaven after Jesus was baptized by John the prophet. God the Father thundered,

. . . “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)

The same word is used by Paul in this verse in reference to Ampliatius.

I have a commentary on the Jewish roots of Romans, written by a believing Jewish scholar named Joseph Shulam. He includes in his commentary on this verse, the fact that Ampliatius was a common name for slaves in first century records. In fact, the name appears on an ancient catacomb in the cemetery of the Domitilla family. The inscriptions clearly indicate that members of this prominent Roman family were followers of Christ.^{iv}

It seems that Ampliatius was one of the servants belonging to this household.

In the catacombs is an unusual sight – a highly decorated tomb with the single name Ampliatius, carved in bold and decorative lettering. Romans had first, middle, and last names, like most Americans who continue the custom, but slaves had only one. The elaborate tomb and the bold lettering, however, would indicate that Ampliatius was a man of high rank and respect in the church, as well as within this family.

I would love to be able to read the biography of Ampliatius. We know, from the early days of the church, as one author wrote, “distinctions of rank were so completely wiped out that it was possible for a man at the same time to be a slave in some household and a leader in the church.”^v

Urbanus (Romans 16:9a)

Paul goes on in Romans 16:9a, to write,

Greet Urbanus (Ουρβανος), our fellow worker in Christ, . . .

His name means “polite”. It gives us our English word “urbane,” which means, “to be smooth and polished in manners”.^{vi}

This is every parent’s fantasy for their kid’s behavior when company comes – that they will miraculously be smooth and polished in manners. This is the reason that parents, just before going to someone’s house or opening the door for visitors, whisper to their kids, “Now, be polite and watch your manners.”

Some of you might say, “I don’t tell my kids that.”

We might respond, “Yea, we know! You ought to try it sometime!”

Now it is possible that Urbanus was a man of rank and social standing. However, Paul specifically mentions, not his social standing, but his servanthood.

Paul writes that Urbanus is “our fellow worker in Christ”. This is the same word Paul used of Prisca, or Priscilla, and Aquila, when he wrote, “my fellow workers” (Romans 16:3).

Urbanus is included in Romans 16, not because of his rank or standing, but because he came alongside and helped. He loved to help! He was known for being a helper.

I can see Urbanus grinning from ear to ear like the little girl in the old commercial who worked with her mother on Daddy’s dinner using Shake and Bake. You may remember this Hall of Fame slogan, “It’s Shake and Bake, Daddy, and I helped.”

“What did you do today, Urbanus?”

“I helped the church body.”

“What do you normally do?”

“I look around for things that need doing and I pitch in.”

This was a man who was inducted into the Hall of Faith simply because – he helped!

Stachys (Romans 16:9b)

Paul, in the last part of Romans 16:9, says to greet,

... *Stachys (Σταχυς) my beloved.*

Paul refers to Stachys, using this wonderfully tender word again, “beloved”.

Apelles (Romans 16:10a)

In Romans 16:10a, Paul writes,

Greet Apelles (Απελλης), the approved in Christ. . . .

Apelles is approved!

Paul used this word in Romans 14 to refer to the mature believer who was sensitive about the conscience of his weaker brother. This was the believer who was willingly giving up something in order to protect the weaker believer from sinning.

Perhaps Apelles was one who took the lead in the difficulty of grey matters.

Paul also used this word in I Corinthians 11:19, when he wrote,

I hear there are divisions among you . . . they must be so that those who are approved will be made evident. (Paraphrased)

Perhaps Apelles was a mature man who responded with wisdom and maturity in the midst of a church conflict.

Something was causing division and unrest in the Corinthian church. Paul said, “This a wonderful time to identify new leaders – those who are mature believers. They will respond to the conflict with grace and tact and insight, where the immature believer will only add fuel to the fire of division.”

Perhaps Apelles was one of the men who rose to the surface as the Roman church struggled with the division between Jews and Gentiles in the assembly. Apelles distinguished himself perhaps, as a new leader, with his wise counsel and humble spirit. He was thus approved.

There is one other use of this word by Paul that I will mention. It is found in his letter to Timothy, when he wrote,

Study to show yourself, approved unto God, rightly interpreting – that is, handling accurately – the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15 Paraphrased)

Perhaps it was this mark of Apelles that impressed the apostle Paul – this man loved to study and interpret the scriptures.

Perhaps it was all of these – Apelles might have been an elder in the church, given the fact that he dealt wisely with conflict in the church, interpreted the scriptures with diligence, and led the way with regard to the younger believers in the congregation who were struggling with what was right and what was wrong.

Household of Aristobulus (Romans 10:10b)

In the last part of Romans 10:10, Paul writes,

... *Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.*

This phrase could refer not only to the family of Aristobulus, but to his servants, which seems to be the case in this verse. It could correctly be interpreted, “Greet those belonging to Aristobulus.”

Note that Paul does not greet Aristobulus, but those who belong to him.

We are helped in regard to this wealthy man’s identity by historical accounts of the well known Roman citizen, Aristobulus. He was the grandson of

Herod the Great – that same Herod who ordered the killing all the Jewish boys two years and under in and around Bethlehem in his attempt to kill Christ.

Aristobulus lived as a private citizen of Rome and was later, a personal friend of Claudius, the emperor who expelled the Jews from Rome.

When he died, his servants and property became of the property of the Emperor, but retained his name, as was the custom of that day.^{vii}

Herodion (Romans 16:11a)

The fact that Aristobulus' servants became the property of the Emperor would explain the reason Paul mentions, in Romans 16:11a, to,

Greet Herodion, my kinsman. . . .

Paul specifically refers to Herodion, as “my kinsman”; that is, my Jewish brother. A Jewish man would not have taken on the name of Herod, unless he was a member of Caesar's household as one of the servants.

Household of Narcissus (Romans 16:11b)

Paul goes on to write, in Romans 16:11b,

. . . Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

Literally, “Greet those belonging to the household of Narcissus; those servants who are believers in the Lord.” Evidently, not all of the servants were believers, and Paul was specifically addressing those who were.

Once again, the name of Narcissus was a common name in Rome during the days of Paul. However, there is the implication of the household or the properties of Narcissus, which implies a transference to the royal family upon the death of Narcissus, whom Paul does not address.

It is likely that this was the powerful personal secretary to the emperor Claudius. He amassed a private fortune of several million dollars (in our current economy), by his notorious influence over the Roman emperor. His power resided in the fact that all correspondence addressed to the Emperor had to pass through his hands and never reached Claudius unless Narcissus allowed it to do so.

So he made his fortune from the bribes that people paid him to ensure that their petitions were sent on to the Emperor. It was a great system, and this man built his fortune and increased his possessions as well as his household of servants.^{viii}

It was short-lived. When Claudius was murdered and Nero ascended the throne, Narcissus was exposed for his corruption and put to death. His household became the possession of Nero.^{ix}

This seems to be the answer to the question of how the gospel of Christ come into the highest reaches of political power – so that later, Paul could write to the Philippians, while he was in Rome,

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. (Philippians 4:22)

Who were the saints in Caesar's palace? They were the converted slaves of Aristobulus and Narcissus; they were the royal sons and daughters of Christ who were written into the Hall of Faith. Though serving in the palace of a temporary and brutal king, they were members of the immortal Household of Faith, who ultimately belonged to the King of Kings.

Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:12a)

In Romans 16:12a, Paul writes,

Greet Tryphaena (Τρυφαινα) and Tryphosa (Τρυφωσα), workers in the Lord.

Many language scholars believe these are twin sisters, given the poetic nature of their feminine names. It was common in Paul's day – as it is to this day – to name twins using the same root word for both names.^x

The little twist in their names adds a different nuance of meaning. *Τρυφαινα* could be rendered “dainty” and *Τρυφωσα* could be translated “delicate”.^{xi}

However, Paul uses the same word for “work” that he used earlier for Mary. Tryphaena and Tryphosa may have been named dainty and delicate, but they labored hard for the work of the Lord.

Persis (Romans 16:12b)

Paul mentions next, in Romans 16:12b,

Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

Most believe Persis was the older sister of Tryphaena and Tryphosa. However, in her case, Paul writes in the past tense, “has worked hard in the Lord.” This is an implication that she has already died. Her testimony of labor for the Lord, however, was still worthy of commendation. After all, this is the Hall of Faith.

Rufus and his mother (Romans 16:13)

Perhaps one of the most intriguing inductees into this Hall of Faith is next. Paul writes, in Romans 16:13,

Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord; also his mother and mine.

Although Rufus was a common name, there is evidence that this Rufus was one of the two sons of Simon, the Cyrenian, who was compelled to carry the crossbeam of Christ up Golgotha.

Mark wrote his gospel account a few years after Paul wrote this letter to the Romans believers. Mark's gospel would also be directed primarily to the Roman world.

It is fascinating and not surprising that Mark would be the only gospel writer who would give one detail that the other gospel accounts would leave out. Matthew records that Simon was compelled to carry Christ's cross. Luke also mentions that Simon was forced to carry the crossbeam. When Mark tells this particular part of the account, however, he adds the aside; the commentary that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21).

Mark, in fact, puts this comment in parenthesis. Why? Because the believers in Rome knew about Simon, and they knew who Rufus was, but they might not have known that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus – who was at that very moment, a leader in the church in Rome.

We also have mention of Simon of Cyrene serving in the early church in Antioch.

There is little doubt by any commentator or Bible historian that I researched that Simon became a believer in this Lamb of God, whose crossbeam he carried up that hill. There is also little doubt that his son Rufus became a believer as well, and served in the church at Rome.

Paul writes, "Tell Rufus and his mother hello!" In fact, Paul affectionately refers to this woman as his own mother. This is a reference to the fact that Paul knew her and had been ministered to by her.

Ten Hall of Faith Servants (Romans 16:14-15)

Paul crams ten more people into his Hall of Faith without any description of them whatsoever. They are listed in two groups of five people. They appear in Romans 16:14-15. I could pronounce their names

if I had time – well, for the record, let us finish the list.

In Romans 16:14, Paul writes, using the Greek pronunciation of Asyncritus, by the way,

Greet Asyncritus (Ἀσυγκριτος), Phlegon (Φλεγων), Hermes (Ἑρμης), Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

Evidently this is a house church gathered together.

In Romans 16:15, Paul continues,

Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus (Νηρευς) and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

More than likely, Philologus and Julia were a husband and wife, and Nereus and his sister were their children. Most believe Olympas was a member of their household. In other words, Paul is greeting all the believers who are gathered in their home.

With this, Paul closes his personal greetings of warmth and affection. He then commands all of them to show affection and love to one another, as he writes in Romans 16:16,

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

This was a holy kiss – set apart from anything sensual or intimate, but warm and affectionate. It would be comparable to a hug in our culture or a handshake.

If you have traveled abroad, you have encountered this custom still taking place, in one form or another. I remember visiting the church in Toulon, France. They kiss on both cheeks, although it is really more kissing the air than cheeks, which I appreciated. I stayed a shade of red when I was greeted by the men and women who kissed me on both cheeks and I returned the greeting.

Our friend and missionary to Russia and beyond, Duane Early told me that in Russia, the men in the church do not greet the women with a kiss – that would be improper – but they greet one another in the church with a kiss on the lips.

I said, "Really?"

He said, "Oh yea, those big Russian men with their full beards follow their custom in the church of giving all the brothers a quick smack on the lips."

I said, "I am never visiting the church in Russia. I'll wait until heaven to greet them!"

Conclusion

Three truths emerged in my mind and spirit from visiting this Hall of Faith. Let me give them to you.

1. Being inducted into the Hall of Faith did not require great ability, but availability – which someone once said was the greatest ability one could have.
2. Being inducted in the Hall of Faith did not require some dramatic act of service, but dependable acts of service.

For some of these in the latter verses, it just meant showing up and being counted as one of the children of God!

3. Being inducted into the Hall of Faith did not require being honored by men, but being humble before God.

As we learned, many of these people were slaves who had accepted the Savior.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote that “Fame usually comes to those who are thinking of something else.”^{xii}

These people qualified. The truth is, they were thinking of anyone other than themselves. Most importantly, they were thinking of Someone else – the Chief Shepherd of the Church who came and took upon Himself the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Being inducted into the Hall of Faith means being conformed into the image of our Great Servant-Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/1/2006 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Webster’s New World Dictionary (Nashville, TN, Southwestern Company, 1964), p. 272.

ⁱⁱ Roy L. Laurin, Romans: Where Life Begins (Kregel, 1988), p. 499.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 384.

^{iv} Joseph Shulam, A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans (Lederer Books, 1997), p. 516.

^v William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 212.

^{vi} Webster, p. 816.

^{vii} Barclay, p. 213.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Romans (Augsburg Publishing, 1936), p. 909.

^x Woodrow Knoll, Romans: Righteousness in Christ (AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 240.

^{xi} Lenski, p. 910.

^{xii} Bob Phillips, Phillips’ Book of Great Thoughts (Tyndale House, 1993), p. 122.