

A Gallery of Grace

When the Roll is Called Up Yonder – Part VI

Romans 16:21-24

Introduction

Several years ago, my wife and I had the privilege, while visiting missionaries in Vienna, Austria, to visit their famous museum. We walked past the famous masterpieces of Raphael, Sir Anthony Van Dyck, and Rembrandt.

In our own city of Raleigh, North Carolina, at the Museum of Art, the paintings of Monet are being displayed for several months. They are beautiful masterpieces of color and charm.

How much is good art worth?

I read recently that one painting by Vincent Van Gogh was sold at auction for 82 million dollars.

More recently, the most expensive work of art in history was sold – a painting by Picasso, which sold for 104 million dollars. That is an incredible return on investment, since the seller had purchased the painting before Picasso was all that famous. He purchased the painting in 1950, for 30,000 dollars. Imagine, fifty-six years later, this painting jumping in price by more than 100 million dollars.

Frankly, it is staggering to me to see what people consider priceless. However, I personally find the lives of the artists themselves even more interesting.

Van Gogh, a former Methodist minister who struggled with rejection and guilt, and eventually took his own life, said these final words to his brother, “The sadness will last forever.”

Picasso’s final words were, “Drink to me.”ⁱ

When you go to a large museum, you will see hanging on the walls of some galleries the priceless

works of artists who long ago made their mark. There may be famous etchings and carvings and sculpted works of bronze and marble along with famous paintings that people clamor to own.

I find it fascinating that God considers His greatest masterpiece to be made of flesh and blood. His greatest works are clothed in skin – you and I are His living, breathing works of art.

To the Ephesians, Paul wrote that,

... we are God’s workmanship ...
(Ephesians 2:10)

This is from the word “poiema”. We are literally the poem of God – His work of art.

If you want to visit the greatest gallery of master works – go to church and look around. Take a good look at the masterpiece sitting near you – a masterpiece of God’s grace.

Ladies and gentlemen, the most priceless works of art are the redeemed – men and women of all ages, created with the masterstrokes of grace; people who now belong to the Master Artist, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Romans chapter 16 is nothing less than a gallery of grace, where we have been introduced to ordinary people who were a part of the church at Rome. Think of the church at Rome as the best art gallery around.

In Paul’s closing words, he has sent greetings to many of them. Now, as Paul comes to a close in his greetings, he sends “hellos,” not from himself, but from other Christians living in Corinth who are part of the Corinthian gallery of grace.

The Gallery of Grace

Timothy

Notice Romans 16:21a. Paul writes,

Timothy my fellow worker greets you, . . .

Without a doubt, Timothy was closer to Paul than any other person on the planet. Paul poured hours and hours into the disciplining of this young man, who would go on to lead several of the churches Paul helped plant, including the renowned church at Ephesus.

Timothy was the son of a racially mixed marriage. His father was an unbelieving Greek and his mother was a Jewess.

In Paul's two letters to Timothy, we are never told when Timothy became a believer. However, putting some of the clues together, we can discover that Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, were evidently led to Christ during Paul's first missionary journey to their hometown in Lystra.

Along with Timothy, Eunice and Lois were already faithful Jews, grounded in their loyalty to the hope of Israel in the Old Testament scriptures – they believed the Messiah would come. When they heard Paul deliver the news that Jesus had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies with precision, they gave their lives to following Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

They also saw the miracles of Paul – validating this new era of grace – with the healing of a crippled man. The book of Acts records that Paul looked at the man, crippled from birth, and said,

. . . “Stand upright on your feet.” And he leaped up and began to walk. (Acts 14:10)

The citizens of Lystra assumed that the gods had come to earth and began to worship Paul and Barnabas, until Paul was able to convince them that they were men empowered by the true and living God.

Timothy, Eunice and Lois may have witnessed the mad rush to worship Paul. Perhaps they listened as Jews arrived from Antioch and won over the people so this same crowd picked up stones to kill Paul – and then, dragged him out of the city, presumed to be dead.

Acts records that the disciples stood around Paul and witnessed what many believe to be his return to life. He literally stood up and reentered the city (Acts 14:19-20).

Some time later, Acts 16 records that Paul returned to Lystra and was introduced to Timothy, who began to accompany him on his journeys. Many believe that Timothy was around twenty-one years of age when he left to travel with Paul.

At some point, twenty-one years earlier, his mother, who had violated the law of God by marrying an unbelieving Gentile, must have offered her prayer and hope for her newborn son as she named him “Timothy,” which means, “honoring God”. It is almost as if she said, “I didn't honor God when I married my husband; I didn't honor God when I put my heart before the word of God, but now, with the birth of this child, I will honor and follow God.”

She and her mother poured their lives into young Timothy so that later, Paul would write to him and challenge him to,

. . . continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (II Timothy 3:14-15)

Let me say something about this masterpiece of grace – a son born to a believing mother and unbelieving father.

The absence of a godly father does not hinder the work God the Father. The work of God's grace in our lives is not genetic, it is supernatural. It can be fostered and nurtured by a godly parent, as Timothy testifies, but it is not dependent on a godly heritage.

If you have a godly heritage, do not take it for granted. Instead, benefit from it, learn from it, go further because of it.

If you do not have a godly heritage, do not be discouraged. God's plan for your life is not shortchanged because you were not raised in the truth. Now that you have come to faith in Christ, begin the heritage. Start with your home, your children, your life.

Years later, it will be Timothy that Paul sends to Thessalonica to build up the saints and settle the issues. It will be Timothy whom Paul sends to the Corinthians to,

. . . remind [them] of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (I Corinthians 4:17)

It will be Timothy who is sent to the Philippian believers with a commendation from Paul that reads,

For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. (Philippians 2:20)

Surely this kind of insight, passion, and faithfulness is the result of three and four generations of faithful Christianity. This is the way one gets in the gallery of grace, right?!

Ladies and gentlemen, godly parents do not guarantee godly progress. In the same way, unbelieving parents do not guarantee unbelief in their children.

Let me say this in another way; a way which was true in the life of this faithful man of God, Timothy – the lack of spiritual influence in youth does not forfeit spiritual insight in the future.

Paul writes in Romans 16:21a,

Timothy my fellow worker greets you . . .

Lucius

Paul goes on to write in Romans 16:21b,

. . . and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Lucius shows up again in the book of Acts when the leaders of the church in Antioch are mentioned (Acts 13:1). Most believe this was the same Lucius from Cyrene who was a close friend of Simon, the man who carried the cross beam of Christ up the hill.

This Lucius was one of the faithful teachers of the early church in Antioch. It was a church that was led by five men: a Jew from Cyprus named Barnabas, a Gentile, an aristocrat named Manaen who was raised in the same household as Herod Antipas, an African man named Lucius, and a converted rabbi named Saul or Paul.

These leaders include a Gentile, a Jew, a black man, a white man, a poor man, a rich man. The church at Antioch became an example of unity in the face of diversity. In fact, the church in Antioch proved at the very outset that the problem of prejudice is not a problem of class or color, but a problem of character. Convert the character to Christ and solve the problem of class and color.

Another interesting thing about the ministry of Lucius is that he served in a culture of great animosity toward Christianity.

Acts 11:26, in fact, tells us that the disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch.

There are a lot of names in the New Testament for believers; such as:

- steward,
- disciple,
- brother or sister,
- witness,
- saint,
- child of God,
- beloved,
- priest,
- pilgrim,
- elect,
- sons of God,
- bride of Christ.

However, from history, we learn the fact that the name “Christian” was a name the unbelievers devised, not the Christians. In fact, the name “Christian” is only used two other times in the New Testament. It seems to have been originally used as a derogatory name – “little-Christ” or “Christians”.

Perhaps this is the reason Peter associated the name with persecution when he wrote,

but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. (1 Peter 4:16)

What does the name “Christian” mean to you?

- Is it merely a synonym for “American” – “Of course I’m a Christian, I was born in America.”?
- Is it an adjective for nice people – “That man is such a nice Christian man.”?
- Is it a nametag to put on your Sunday dress that is good for twenty-four hours, but then, comes off – a Christian on Sunday and a Babylonian, Monday through Saturday?

“Christian” means, “little Christ” or “one who imitates and adheres to the way of Christ”.

Paul wrote,

. . . to live is Christ . . . (Philippians 1:21)

A Christian is one whose life and living is all about Christ; one who lives in Christ.

Everyone who moved here, to North Carolina, from New York, or California, or Michigan are now North Carolinians, whether you drink sweet tea or

not. Some of you are not sure it is safe to drink. It is!

How did you become a North Carolinian? By moving to and now living in North Carolina.

In the same way, you are a Christian because you have moved into and now live in Christ Jesus.

Paul writes, “Lucius sends greetings.”

Lucius is one of the faithful ones who endured persecution for living up to; for wearing the name of Christ!

Jason

Paul mentions next, in Romans 16:21b,

... *Jason* ...

Jason also appears in a dramatic event, which is recorded in Acts chapter 17. This is when Paul and Silas are preaching the gospel in Thessalonica. Luke records, in Acts 17:5,

... the Jews ... formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

Evidently Paul and Silas had hidden in Jason’s home and then, slipped away. Continue to Acts 17:6-7a,

When [the mob] did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the whole world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, ...”

Can you imagine this scene and this testimony? Luke continues in Acts 17:7b-9,

“... and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King, Jesus.” They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge [literally “bail”] from Jason and the others, they released them.

The courage of Jason does not need much commentary.

He evidently lived to tell the story and, no doubt, brought great respect to the early church.

Jason was the man who put his life on the line for the apostle Paul and the gospel of Christ. He became known as the man who was associated with others who were upsetting the whole world.

What an interesting description of these early believers this is – they had “upset the whole world.” What of Christianity today? We live in an era in which we do not want to upset anyone with the gospel, do we not? Let us make Christianity a pleasant thing; let us advertise Christianity as an easy thing to switch to for people who want to try it. It is all positive and wonderful and blessing filled.

We advertise Christianity in the same way as the real estate groups that send advertisements to buy land and move to the lakeside. They say, “This is the life. Anyone who is anyone lives here . . . find your life of peace and quiet here . . . get away from the pressure and trouble of life.”

Ladies and gentlemen, when I invited Jesus Christ into my life, I invited trouble. Suddenly, I could not go with the flow – I was no longer floating downstream with all the other dead fish, I was swimming upstream, and that was, and is, hard.

Has it ever occurred to you that wherever Paul went, a riot broke out? How is that for progress?

Can you imagine this in Sunday school? “Do you want to join the church? Great, here’s your riot gear! Here’s how to post bail! Just down the hall, they’ll teach you how to bandage open wounds. We’re teaching a new series tonight entitled, ‘Persecution and How to Persevere’.”

No, wherever the church in America goes, it expects appreciation – and deference.

Is our gospel so diluted that it no longer gives the unbelieving world heart-burn? Have we so watered down the truth of Jesus Christ that during election season, politicians claim to be among us because it helps their approval ratings?

Ask Jason what it was like – he is one of the masterpieces in the gallery of grace.

Sosipater

Paul mentions next, in Romans 16:21b,

... *Sosipater, my kinsmen.*

The shortened version of his name is Sopater (pronounced “Sewpeter”).

He was one of the Bereans who came to faith in Christ in Acts 17. He was among those who listened to Paul preach and then, searched the scriptures to see if Paul had told the truth.

Sosipater was evidently one of the many who believed it was true, validated by Old Testament truth, and entered the living church of Jesus Christ.

Tertius

Now we read in Romans 16:22,

I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

This is interesting. Paul was not doing the writing, just the dictating. Tertius, a man in the household of Gaius, was writing whatever Paul said to the Romans.

Many believe that Paul was afflicted with the oriental eye disease ophthalmia, contracted in the lowlands of Pamphylia on his first missionary journey. It was a disease that brought on near blindness.ⁱⁱ

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote,

[This] greeting is in my own hand . . . (I Corinthians 16:21)

This meant that he wrote the last greetings of I Corinthians with his own hand and that someone else had written the rest of the letter as he dictated it to them.

Near the end of the letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote,

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. (Galatians 6:11)

Because of apparent physical difficulty, perhaps with his eyesight, Paul dictated the epistle of Romans to Tertius.

What a privilege this was for Tertius. Paul evidently allowed Tertius to pen his own greeting,

I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

It is even more significant that Tertius is not really a name – it is a number. The Roman masters followed the oriental tradition of identifying their leading servants by numbers.

My wife, youngest daughter, and I visited Monticello recently. Our guide informed us that the servants were not allowed to eat in the big house. They were to put the food on the plates and deliver them to the house, but the leading servant took the plates and put them on the table for Jefferson and Madison and any other guests that might have been there.

We were told that it was a requirement that the slaves who were to bring the plates to the house were to whistle. They were not to stop whistling until they delivered the plates – because by whistling, they were proving they were not eating any of the food.

The leading, supervising servant was the only one in the dining room serving the guests. He was referred to as “Mister,” which was a title that dignified him somewhat over the others.

In the Roman culture, the name Primus was the title of distinction – it meant “first man”; literally, the first servant above the others. It was his job to run absolutely everything in connection with the master’s household.

This, by the way, was the position granted to Joseph in Potiphar’s house. The number one man hired the other servants, supervised the marketing and the grounds of the estate. He was in charge.

He would have simply been referred to as Primus – or Number One.

After him, there were other servants who also had responsibilities of descending importance.

After Primus was Secundus – the second man. Secundus simply meant Second.

After him, was Tertius – the third man. Tertius simply meant Third.

Paul is dictating the letter of Romans to the third man; the third servant in charge.

Gaius

Most believe that Tertius was one of the servants of the man mentioned by Paul in the next verse, Romans 16:23a,

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. . . .

This wealthy man’s estate was large enough to host not only Paul and these friends, but the assembly.

Quartus

If we skip ahead to the last name in Romans 16:23, we find another of Gaius’ servants,

. . . and Quartus, the brother.

He is the number four man. Quartus simply means Fourth.

However, in case we think that servants occupied a lesser status in the church, Paul added the descriptive phrase, “Quartus, the brother.”

Imagine – in the gallery of grace there is a wealthy master and landowner with two servants, who are third and fourth in line, and both are welcomed by the apostle Paul, and more importantly, both are honored as members of the family of God.

Erastus

Paul mentions one other man in Romans 16:23.

. . . Erastus, the city treasurer greets you...

What a blessing to see and hear of a political leader who genuinely aligned himself with the church of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 19:22, he is described as one “who ministered unto Paul.” The present tense indicates a habitual service . . . one who served Paul any way he possibly could – and in so serving Paul, he served the cause of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1929, archeologists working at Corinth uncovered a Latin inscription on a paving block, dating from the first century, which read, “Erastus, commissioner for public works, laid this pavement at his own expense.”

Most believe this was the same Erastus – the steward or manager of Corinth’s business affairs. A. T. Robertson called him, “the city manager”.

There is no evidence that Erastus resigned his post when Paul wrote to the Romans. The context rather indicates that he held the office at the time of the writing and served both Christ and the city of Corinth.^{iv}

He remains today, an example of every businessman or woman; of every level of political leader who not only laid the pavement for the city of Corinth, but helped lay the foundation for the church of Jesus Christ in that city. It is possible even then, and even now, to do both!

Can you imagine the church meeting in the home of distinguished Gaius? His servants have prepared the home – setting out the chairs and fixing the meal. The assembly is gathered and, as was their custom, a loaf of bread and cup of wine were shared among

them, in honor of the body and blood of their Savior given for them. There is Gaius, taking a piece of bread and then, handing it to the servant who had earlier baked it – who now also breaks off a piece and eats. Erastus sips from the cup and passes it to servant number four who bravely sips from the same cup.

Something astonishing is happening on this estate. Something amazing had to have happened to allow for the erasure of status and the equality of mankind.

Conclusion

This is the gallery of grace – where servants and masters, statesman and simple men are turned into brothers.

This is the masterpiece of God – where men and women are redeemed by Christ and drawn together by grace.

There is no color, no class, no personal agenda, no turf to protect – just grace and a love for Jesus Christ.

This is the great gallery of grace – the church then and now – where the pictures are ordinary, but clear and distinctive; different.

Whenever the world stops and takes a look, they see something more priceless than a painting that can be hung on a wall. They see the treasure of a transformed life – the demonstration of love between classes and races and ages. It is the unmistakable work of a Master Artist in this collection of masterpieces called the church that He is still in the process of painting and displaying.

This is the gallery of true masterpieces – displayed to the world and to the hosts of heaven. *We* are the gallery of grace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/29/2006 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

ⁱⁱ John Phillips, *Exploring Romans* (Moody Press, 1969), p. 280.

ⁱⁱⁱ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Personalities Around Paul* (Moody Press, 1973), p. 161.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 162.