

Message Series: Basic Theology, Paul's Epistle to Rome
Message 15: Greeting One Another. Romans 16
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It is our custom to greet people when we come into contact with them. Sometimes, it is a simple nod; sometimes, it is a smile; and sometimes, it is an extended hand, with a few words. However we do it, quite often we don't give it much significance. For us it is primarily a meaningless custom.

But in the New Testament we find that greetings are an important part of our relationship with others. At least 47 times we are encouraged to *greet* one another. As you might assume, the word *greet* that is used in the New Testament, just as today, simply refers to a brief word of friendliness.

Some people object to the use of such greetings, complaining they are empty and meaningless, but the sheer number of them used in the New Testament would seem to indicate otherwise. They may seem meaningless, but can you imagine living in a world without them? I lived in Chicago for a few years and would walk downtown every day for work. The sidewalks were always full of people going somewhere, but there was very little eye-contact, few smiles, and no words of greeting.

To me, any place without words of greeting is an unwelcoming place.

Romans chapter 16 illustrates more than any other portion of God's Word the value of greeting other people. For the sake of its overall impression, I want to read verses 3-16. Please follow as I do...

The words *greet* and *salute* used in this passage, come from the same Greek word. They are only translated differently for variety. Clearly, by using them 18 times the Apostle Paul emphasizes the value of such. As he concludes the book of Romans, not to do so in this manner would have left the message of the book incomplete. In chapter 1 he said he thanked God for them, he prayed for them without ceasing, he longed to see them, and be comforted together with them. And now, at the close of the book, he mentions them by name.

There are some different ways we could approach this chapter, but I want to focus on the simple message of the greetings. There are **four lessons** about the value of greetings we should take away for personal enrichment.

I. A Greeting is Empty only if we make it Empty

First, a greeting is empty *only if* we make it empty.

Having read through this passage full of the briefest words of greeting I don't have the slightest impression they were empty. Paul greets 28 people, 26 of them by name. Every greeting he makes is meaningful, personal, and I'm sure was an encouragement to everyone who received them.

An empty or a meaningful greeting starts with **us**. It is not possible for you and me to meaningfully greet someone else **if** we really do not care about them. Our greetings say something about us before they say anything else. I have always appreciated the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:1-5. Will you look at that passage with me? ...

If you and I have been changed by these things, so that we have the mind of Christ, the humility of Christ, or the compassion of Christ, then people we come into contact with will know it. They will know we care about them even with a simple word of greeting.

People who are selfish, who look out for their own things, and esteem themselves better than others by the focus they give to themselves will never convey a meaningful greeting; it simply is not in them.

It is obvious from the whole book, but especially these verses, that the Apostle Paul cared for people; as a result he made friends. Proverbs 18:24 teaches for us to have friends we must first show ourselves friendly. This is so easy to spot in people. You can usually tell if a person is genuinely interested in you, or only interested in what you might be able to do for them.

Throughout his ministry Paul had willingly put his life on the line for others, so it does not surprise us to read in this list of greetings those who risked their lives for him, or had ministered to him in some way. People respond to people who care about them.

At this point Paul had not been to Rome, but you wouldn't know it reading this chapter. He knew each one of these people, had interacted with them, and had something to say about them. As a result, far from being an empty conclusion to such a weighty book, it is a conclusion filled with deep emotion.

Possibly one of the most profound changes you and I can make is in the way we greet others. They will know if it is empty or meaningful. You and I can make sure it is always meaningful.

II. A Greeting Should Be Our First Step in Ministry

Not only should our greetings be meaningful, they should also be our first step in ministering to others.

Think about it. Every person we meet is in need of some ministry. Whether you and I have the opportunity to meet that need will often be determined by the way we greet them. Dave Thomas, the founder of the Wendy's Restaurants, used to say to his employees, "*If customers don't have a smile to give, make sure to give them one.*" He understood that a friendly greeting was crucial to long term service.

The same is true in ministry. Every visitor to our church has come because they first recognized a need in their life; studies have shown that their decision to return is made within the first few moments of their visit based on the greetings they receive. Our first step in ministering to the needs of others is in the way we greet them. It conveys whether we care or not.

Use yourself as an example. Do you open up to others who have not in some way demonstrated they care about you? Probably not! A genuine greeting makes us feel loved, accepted, and cared for. The first time I walked in the doors of First Baptist Church in LaSalle, Illinois with my long hair and raggedy clothes, they made me want to come back by the way they greeted me. Those same people still make me feel loved today.

The Apostle Paul understood all of this as he concluded this letter to the Romans. Look at his instructions on how to receive Phoebe in verse 2...

Notice the four simple points he makes: (1) receive her, (2) in the Lord, (3) as becomes saints, and (4) assist her. That's how we greet people!

First we receive them. We make them feel accepted. When I walked into First Baptist Church with my long hair and raggedy clothes, they had every reason to reject me. I represented the opposite of what they wanted for their children. But instead, they received me, made me feel welcome and accepted.

Second, we are to receive people *in the Lord*. This refers to all that the Lord is. Romans 5:8, reminds us, “*God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” We receive others based on who the Lord is and what He has done.

Third, we receive people in the way which *becomes saints*. That means first of all that we don’t ignore them. It also means that we don’t judge them. Instead, we receive them just as the Lord received us and set us apart to Himself. That’s what a saint is, *one set apart to God*.

And fourth, we are to assist them in *whatsoever*. I already mentioned that whenever someone comes to our church it is because they have already recognized a need in their life. If we don’t do anything to help identify that need then we are doing nothing to assist the. Helping to assist others starts in the way we greet them.

If we really want to make a difference in the way we touch other people’s lives, then the place to start is in the way we greet them.

III. A Greeting is not for Personal Advancement

We also learn in this passage that a greeting is not for personal advancement. Look again at verses 17-20...

Many have found it odd that these verses are included in the midst of Paul’s list of greetings. Certainly they can appear out of place. They are the strongest words of warning against *deceivers* used by the Apostle in the book of Romans. But with a little thought you begin to realize they fit well. Deceivers are smooth in the way they greet people. They are skilled in using their words for personal advancement. Ultimately their motives spring from Satan, the Deceiver himself, and father of lies. Paul says we are to *avoid* such people. Being a friendly and helpful person does not mean we are to forget to use discernment.

I want to use Paul's warning for our application in the use of greetings. There should be no place given in our greetings for smooth talk and flattery designed to deceive. If we use our greetings for personal advancement then we are not in the company of the *saints* mentioned in verse 2, but of those *who serve their own belly* mentioned in verse 18.

For instance, church is not the place to meet people in order to advance your cause, your ideas, your business, or yourself. Church is for ministry, for helping others, and advancing the cause of Christ.

People need what Jesus has to give, not what you and I have.

IV. A Greeting is Ultimately Used for God's Glory

Finally, rather than personal advancement, a greeting is ultimately used for God's glory. Follow as I read verses 25-27...

This is the closing benediction of the book. It concerns the power and message of God disclosed to us in the gospel. That's what the whole book has been about. In its pages we have learned about our sinfulness and the consequences of our sin. We have learned about the righteousness of God made available to us through Jesus Christ. And we have learned how having Jesus Christ in our life is intended to change us.

The gospel is the most powerful and the most important message in the world. It is why we are alive and what we live for.

When we greet people, it should be about the gospel, the life we have in Christ, and the life Christ has to give. When that is the case, then God gets the glory, and our greetings will be meaningful and effective in ministering to people.

In closing, how do you reach out to people? Is it for God's glory, or your own? Do a gut check today and make sure it is for God's glory. 1 Corinthians 10:31 exhorts that whatever we do it is to be for God's glory, that would include even our greetings.