

Verses 1-16 and 21-23 of this chapter are far more than a dull list of names. They are a vivid illustration of many verses Paul has written to describe the church. Like this one: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The twenty-eight names include both Jewish ones like Mary (Miriam), Priscilla, and Aquila and Greek ones like Patrobus or Hermes.

Some names like Nereus were used only for slaves. And those listed as belonging to the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus would have been slaves under those masters. (And in an elevated position. This is likely the Narcissus, a freedman, who was among the emperor Claudius's closest advisers). But the list also includes top officials like Erastus, the director of public works in Corinth (a name and title confirmed by twentieth century archaeology).

More than a third of the names are women. (Most translations of verse 7 have Junia, the feminine version, not Junias.) Paul not only names the women but makes it clear they are valued colleagues in the Lord's work.

In this group are different generations, such as Rufus and his mother. Urbanus would have been a city dweller, but others like Asyncritus and Phlegon, by their name origins, may well have been recent immigrants from Asia, unsophisticated in the ways of Rome.

No organization in ancient Rome other than the Body of Christ could have brought together people from such varying ethnic groups, social position, marital status, and educational levels. No uniting force other than the Holy Spirit could have knit them together in love and bound them in the harmony that overlooks all other distinctions. (Col. 2:2, Rom. 12:16).

That was Christ's desire for His body then, as Paul so often exhorted and instructed. It is His desire today, that His people in all their diversity unify by gathering to Him alone.

Questions:

1. What are some verses or scriptural principles that are illustrated here in Paul's "fellowship letter"?
2. How are the saints in these verses showing love to each other?
3. Cenchrea, from verse 1, was the harbor on the eastern side of the isthmus occupied by Corinth. That's why most scholars assume the letter was written in Corinth. Phoebe is the sister who carries the letter to Rome. What do we learn here about letters of commendation?

4. Which person in this section was also named in the gospels (probably)?
5. The word *heretic* means one who causes divisions. What are some examples, and what is our scriptural response?
6. Verse 17 mentions obstacles that are contrary to sound teaching. Like what?
7. What does it mean to be wise about what is good and innocent or simple about evil?
8. What does it mean to be “established” in verse 25?
9. Identify the “mystery” of verses 25-26.