

"THE BODY OF CHRIST "

(Romans 16:1-16)

(Chuck Swindoll)

As I reflect on these verses—which are too easily dismissed as we near the end of Paul's letter—I find several truths concerning the body of Christ illustrated.

The body of Christ has variety within its unity. Paul's close associates included singles, married couples, widows, and widowers. He greeted men and women, slaves and social elites, new Christians and mature believers, Greeks, Romans, and Jews. He had met some in prisons, many in synagogues, several in market places, a few in churches. . . yet all of them in the course of proclaiming Christ. They came from all over the empire, from multiple backgrounds and traditions, but they all shared one thing in common: salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

The body of Christ is held together by those who serve in obscurity. Phoebe was a unifying force in the church near Corinth and someone the Lord called upon to carry this monumentally important letter to Rome. Yet we know nothing more about her. Mary, Urbanus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa (twins, perhaps?), and Persis were noted for their faithful labors. Nothing more is known of them, neither from Scripture nor any reliable historical documents. Priscilla and Aquila served with Paul in Corinth, stabilized the church in Ephesus, and undoubtedly did the same in Rome. Yet, again, we know nothing of them beyond these brief acknowledgments in Scripture. The twenty-seven names in this list represent countless others who quietly and profoundly enrich the body of Christ.

The body of Christ is characterized by simple, down-to-earth love. Paul's greetings are relatively unadorned, considering the bond he shared with many of the individuals. Phoebe was crucial to the church in Cenchrea. He shared his vocation of tent making and his ministry of disciple making with Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, Ephesus, and now Rome. He shared a dungeon with Andronicus and Junias, and labor with Mary, Urbanus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis. He shared history with these twenty-seven men and women, and his love for them transcended the need for flowery words. Instead, Paul used words to demonstrate the value he held for them rather than merely tell of his feelings.

Paul's list of greetings reflects his vision for the local church. A congregation should be no less diverse than the community surrounding it, yet its people should be unified by singular devotion to their Savior. A congregation should be filled with people who desire to work, serve, share, and suffer without accolades. A congregation should be eager to express appreciation for one another for specific reasons that can be called to mind quickly. And a congregation should be so united in love that a kiss on the cheek would feel as natural as a hug or a handshake.

But don't kiss me if you don't love me.

