



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 10

ROMANS^{Part 145}

Chapter 16:12-14

Persis; Rufus; Asyncritus; Phlegon



Greet Persis, the beloved, who toils much in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon.

If ever there were ignoble names, these are them. These names are the odious counterpoints to last week's tongue-titillating nominations: "Tryphena" and "Tryphosa." If Tryphena and Tryphosa are a symphony of consonants and vowels (which they are), then here are the accidental noises of ignoble body processes. "Phlegon" sounds like the noise that a cat makes when it hacks up a hairball. I can't help but think that "Rufus" might have been a doofus. "Asyncritus" sounds, to me, like something for which a doctor would prescribe castor oil and bed rest. "Persis" could possibly be cured by Robitussin 12-Hour Cough Relief.

Having said this, I love these people. There are pioneers of Paul's evangel, headlining the Believers' Hall of Fame.

PERSIS

The name "Persis" means "Persian woman." It was also a typical Greek slave name, so Persis may have been either a former or a then slave. Persis is not only beloved by Paul, but she "toils much in the Lord."

I will use Paul's commendation of this woman to point out to you the difference between "in Christ" and "in the Lord." These are not incidental distinctions.

The title "Christ" is the Greek *Christos* and it means "anointed." This is not Jesus Christ's last name, but a title. It's what He *is*—"Jesus, the anointed One." "Anointing" speaks of God singling one out for a sacred task. In the Jewish religion, both kings and priests were anointed. The word itself means "pour oil upon, smear with ointment." People like David (the king) and Aaron (the priest) were anointed. They literally had oil smeared on them. But as I said, it was ceremonial. (Looking back, I see that I hadn't said that yet.) The oil itself had no magical properties. It was simply God saying, "I want *this* one," and then physically demonstrating it with oil.

We members of the body of Christ are anointed by God to be “in Christ.” The oil is unnecessary; it is superseded by God’s own Word; we were chosen by God before the disruption of the world (Ephesians 1:4). This is our anointing. It’s God singling us out. Instead of pouring oil on us, He smears us with His declaration. It’s less messy but far deeper reaching. Doesn’t it feel good to know that He chose us? Is this not more valuable than the product of a pressed olive?

We have this in common with the Roman believers and with all believers and—in fact—with Jesus Himself: we are all “anointed.” We are all chosen. This is our common lot, and this is what it means to be “in Christ.”

Then what of “in the Lord”?

The word “lord” comes from the Greek *kurios*, and it means “sanctioner.” When used of Christ, it refers to His authority (He either sanctions a thing or He doesn’t; He calls the shots) and it relates to service. The phrase “in the Lord,” then, recognizes distinctions between people—their person and their service to Christ.

In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul writes—

For you are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. For whoever are baptized into Christ, put on Christ, in Whom there is no Jew nor yet Greek, there is no slave nor yet free, there is no male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.

Do you see the phrase “in the Lord” anywhere in this context? No, you don’t. It’s all “faith in Christ,” “baptized into Christ,” “put on Christ,” and “you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is our common lot. It’s the high calling from above to which we all belong. It’s God’s high *nomination* of us (“anointed”) as His sons and daughters. When considering this high calling, notice how distinctions vanish. Forget Jew or Greek here. Forget slave or free. Forget male or female. We’re all one in Christ where distinctions such as these are irrelevant. This is the absolute viewpoint. As such, we ought not confuse it with or substitute it for the relative viewpoint, and vice-versa. Because now consider Colossians 3:17-24—

And everything, whatsoever you may be doing, in word or in act, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, the Father, through Him. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your own wives and be not bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord. Fathers,

do not vex your children, lest they may be disheartened. Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-slavery, as manpleasers, but with singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. All, whatsoever you may be doing, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men, being aware that from the Lord you will be getting the compensation of the enjoyment of an allotment: for the Lord Christ are you slaving.

The emphasis at the start is “whatsoever you may be doing.” The saints are to “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The name “Christ” is mentioned, yes, but not “in Christ.” Paul references Christ as “Lord,” drawing our eyes downward where we distinguish between people and their individual services.

When Paul uses the phrase “in the Lord,” look for him to note differing service. Wives are to be subject to their husbands, for instance, not “in Christ,” but “as is proper in the Lord.” Children obeying parents is “well pleasing in the Lord.” (“In Christ,” on the other hand, parents and children are considered one; their differences are unnoted and unconsidered; it’s a higher viewpoint; same with husbands and wives.) Slaves are to obey their masters, “fearing the Lord.” Paul ends this entreaty as he began it, “whatsoever you may be doing, work from the soul as to the Lord,” and “being aware that from the Lord you will be getting compensation...”

The line between “in Christ” and “in the Lord” ought not be crossed. Let’s say that a man enters the women’s bathroom at a Scripture conference. The women shriek, but the man says, “Don’t worry. In Christ there is neither male nor female.” Tell it to the judge, Mister. There are no distinctions in Christ, yes, but the person who built the separate bathrooms did it “as unto the Lord.” Any time one



does something—such as walk into into another gender’s bathroom)—one *does* it “in the Lord” and therefore better be noting distinctions.

A parent warns a child of coming discipline, and the kid says, “You can’t do that. We are all one in Christ.” The kid has a point, but it’s not going to help him here. While his relationship with his parents may very well be “in Christ,” he now operates in the realm of “in the Lord.” This realm very much considers what the kid *did* to the neighbor’s window with his baseball. His baseball is not “in Christ,” and I predict that he is about to be grounded “in the Lord.”



Paul recognizes Persis for her toil “in the Lord.” No one toils “in Christ.” One may toil *for* Christ, but never *in* Christ. Being in Christ is a state of being; it is a reality defying distinctions of person or of service. “In the Lord,” on the other hand, recognizes peculiarities of person and of service. You might say that “in the Lord” is where we live and what we do, but “in Christ” is what we are.

RUFUS

Rufus was an American funk band from Chicago, best known for launching the career of lead singer Chaka Khan. Rufus scored several hits, including “Tell Me Something Good”, “Sweet Thing”, “Do You Love What You Feel” and “Ain’t Nobody.” As Rufus did not exist until the early 1970’s A.D., this cannot be who Paul is referring to in Romans 16:13. We must seek elsewhere. Let’s try the first century.

And they are conscripting a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, passing along, coming from a field, the father of Alexander and Rufus, that he should be picking up His cross (Mark 15:21).

It is believed by many, including myself (because I admittedly *want* to believe it), that the man mentioned by Paul is none other than the son of the man whom the Romans forced to carry Jesus’ cross. Why are Simon’s sons even mentioned and named? Is God calling our attention to the man in Romans 16:13? If so, then why?

Of all those whom Paul greets, Rufus is the only one noted to be “chosen in the Lord.” Does this mean that the others were not chosen? No. I think it does mean that Rufus may have been especially chosen, or over-chosen, or even obviously chosen. I pick “over chosen.” He reminds me of keyboardist and vocalist Gregg Rolie, who was not only a founding member of Santana, but, in 1973, joined a new band with ex-Santana guitarist Neal Schon. This band became Journey. Lightning does strike twice. Same with Rufus. First his dad carried the cross of Christ (lightning strike #1), then he ended up in the Bible on his own merits through knowing Paul and becoming a member of the body of Christ (lightning strike #2). The guy had the heck chosen out of him.

I have an additional idea about this.

The Romans conscripted Rufus’ dad, Simon, to carry Jesus Christ’s cross. To say, “what an honor” is an understatement. And yet what did Simon do to earn this honor? Nothing. He “just happened” to be in the right place at the right time. (Although, on the day the Romans conscripted him, he may not have considered it such a treat. Hindsight would have corrected this vision.)

How many people lined the Way of Sorrows on that fateful day? Probably hundreds. What is the distance between Pilate’s Praetorium to Golgotha? 650 yards. Who decided where Jesus would falter along that route and who He’d be walking past when it happened? God. Who decided that a Roman soldier would pull a “random man” from the crowd, and that this man would





be Simon, a native of Cyrene, and that he would have two sons, one named Rufus, the other Alexander, and that Rufus would eventually meet an ex-Pharisee named Paul, who was God's appointed herald of a new message of grace to the nations and the first member of a small group of humans who would eventually complete the reconciliation of the universe? God.

Does not this man's appointment and his destiny remind you of how one becomes a member of the body of Christ? One doesn't volunteer for this body, one is drafted into it. One is conscripted. One looks around and says, "Who? Me?" Simon did not wake up that morning conspiring to become a notable for all ages, or to help the Savior of the World carry the timber to the place where He would despoil the principalities and powers of darkness and redeem not only the world but the universe from sin. Thus also, us. Speaking for myself, I wanted to be a professional drummer when I grew up. Yet God said, "You will be a herald of a divine message in the mold of Paul." I said, "Who? Me?"

We are designated beforehand and then called based on this designation (Romans 8:30).

If Simon were not a follower of Christ before this, he

became one afterward. I like to imagine Simon meeting Jesus again after the resurrection.

JESUS: I really appreciated your assistance there.

SIMON: Let's not do *that* again.

Did Simon forsake his Israel calling to become a member of the body of Christ? We don't know. But because his son is noted as a follower of Paul, I believe that he did. I believe that God designated Simon for membership into Christ's body before the disruption of the world. Did Peter introduce him to Paul? I can't think of a better catalyst. What was to stop Simon from hanging around Peter—a man who eventually hung around Paul? What was to stop Paul from shaking the hand of the man introduced to him as, "The man who helped our Lord carry His cross"? And then what was to stop Paul from saying to this man, "Hey, do you want to hear something really different?" And what was to stop this man—a rebel anyway—from saying, "Sure." And then what was to stop Simon from giving the truth to his two sons, one of whom would end up in Rome with a bunch of other people who one day received a letter from Paul via their fellow-believer Phoebe, a letter documenting their treasure in Christ?

Nothing.

“[Greet] his mother and mine.” The woman called out here by Paul is Rufus’ mother by nature, and Paul’s by affection. The woman must surely have cared for Paul in some motherly way. Perhaps she made him chicken noodle soup, or bathed him after beatings, or kissed him fondly all over his face whenever his face showed up. In any case, I’m picturing her in a blue apron baking chocolate chip cookies and serving them at the meetings. I bet she was cherubically overweight; I hope so. I bet Paul sent her Mother’s Day cards because his own mother had probably forsaken him years ago when he counted the religion of his ancestors to be dung in light of the greater glory.



He looked for a mother figure and found one in the mother of Rufus. It was generous of Rufus to share her. The 1970’s band of the same name would not have done it. Chaka Kahn would probably not have done it. May God remember the mother of Rufus. Well, He did. He immortalized her.

ASYNCRITUS

The name “Asyncritus” means “incomparable.” The Keyword Concordance of the CLNT states the elements of his name to be, UN-TOGETHER-JUDGED,” which is consistent with “incomparable”; one who cannot be judged together with others probably cannot be compared with others either. Such a man is “unto himself;” incomparable. Here is God winking again. Asyncritus was probably a “blend-in” kind of guy in real life, but in God’s world he was incomparable. Isn’t it nice to think that this is how God considers us?

PHLEGON

I joked at the beginning of this article that “Phlegon” sounded like the noise that a cat makes when it hacks up a hairball. I was close—I was only off by one species. Apparently, in classical Greek literature, this is a common name for a dog. It’s not the Greek word *for* dog, mind you (that would be *kuón*), but something that the Greeks commonly *named* their dogs. Naming one’s son “Phlegon,” back in

Paul’s day, would be today’s equivalent of naming a son “Fido,” “Buster,” “Duke” or “Bow-Wow.” Not exactly complimentary. It’s not exactly a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

UNCLE BILL: What do you want to do when you grow up, Phlegon?

PHLEGON: I just kind of what to chase sticks and scratch behind my ear. Is that weird? Even now, I circle the toilet three times before using it.

Of course, this name is perfect for a member of the nations coming into the body of Christ. For did not the Jews refer to the Greeks as dogs? So here is God winking again, taking “Bow-Wow” and making him a member of the most esteemed body (to heavenly gaze) on planet Earth.



The actual *meaning* of Phlegon’s name is “blazing.” How ironic. The guy named after a common household cur blazes a trail, with Paul, to heaven, and will eventually travel *to* heaven, from Earth, at blazing speed.

Put *that* behind your ear and scratch it. —MZ

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