



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 5

ROMANS Part 141

Chapter 16:5-7

Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus & Junias



Greet Epanetus, my beloved, who is the firstfruit of the province of Asia for Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who toils much for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives and my fellow captives who are notable among the apostles, who also came to be in Christ before me.

I love these people. I love Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junias. These are my folks. When I meet them, we'll hit the ground running. Correction:

we'll hit the *air* running.

We will have so much in common. These were ordinary people, just like us. They struggled with being strangers in the world, just as we struggle. Like us, they heard and responded to the gospel of Paul. It wasn't technically the "gospel of Paul," but the gospel of Christ that the Savior of the world *gave* to Paul. Along with giving Paul the message, Christ gave the former Pharisee the spirit-boost required to believe the message. The spirit came, invisibly, into him. It's the same thing Christ did with Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus, Junias and us: He sends the spirit. I don't know how He does it. It's invisible. It's somewhat like electricity. It makes you do stuff that you didn't do before. It makes you understand spiritual things.

The coming of the spirit on Paul, on Epanetus, on Mary, on Andronicus and on Junias is the same coming on that we experience today. It does not manifest itself in singing or dancing or speaking in tongues, but in believing truth. God uses the same procedure; it's identical. Never has the procedure been updated; it doesn't need updated. It worked perfectly fine from the get-go and it still works today. There are no new versions of it, as with modern computer operating systems. Nothing has changed in the means of making the news of the grace of God known. The spirit of God makes you think different thoughts and see things and believe things as you never saw or believed them before.

I WISH THEY WERE STILL HERE

I'm sorry that these people are dead, I really am. I want to go over to the houses of Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junias. Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junias got in on the foundation of this thing and they used to drink coffee while discussing it, just as we do. But they're no more in it than we are. They started it; we are finishing it. We will be excited to see them, and we will say to them, "You guys started it!" But they

will say to us, just as excitedly, “Yes, but you guys finished it!” Then we will say, “Yes, but you guys knew Paul *personally!*” And they will say, “Yeah, but you guys believed it *without* knowing Paul personally!” And we will say, “Great point!” And then we—you and me—will feel pretty good about ourselves. It will all be baloney, because only the spirit of God can make anyone believe the evangel, whether one is personally with Paul or not. How many of the Jews *were* personally with Paul who, nevertheless, wanted nothing to do with the evangel and, in fact, wanted to kill that decent man? They didn’t want to kill him while he was out killing Christians, no, but only after he became a loving person determined to tell us how Christ had rescued us from sin and death. So in any era, it is not the personality or presence of a person that truly matters, but the spirit of God that makes the evangel known.

Then we’ll high-five these fine people and drink coffee with them en route to our celestial home.

Every time I read these peoples’ names at a conference, I cry. I can hardly stand it, how much I respect and love Epanetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junias—how much I respect the strength they possessed; how consistent their faith was; how much they valued and took care of our apostle; how they’re going to rush over to us through the air when they see us, to compare notes.

EPANETUS

I would probably nurture a bromance with Epanetus. Paul calls him, “beloved.” See? Everybody loves Epanetus. What’s not to love? He was “the firstfruit of the province of Asia.” A pioneer, this man. No credit to him, but it’s a title that even Paul recognizes. It’s important to Paul to recognize that Epanetus was the first person in Asia to understand the message. Epanetus broke the ice. And there was plenty of ice. Paul would have introduced him with, “This is Epanetus, the first person to believe in Asia; this guy broke the ice, and there was plenty of ice.” The acknowledgment would have impressed people, no matter that Epanetus really had nothing to do with it other than to be the recipient of spirit. Epanetus would still feel good



about the notoriety. As I said, Paul encouraged it. I have to think that Epanetus smiled a little (or a lot) when this letter (Romans) was read, and the apostle had remembered him as “the firstfruit of the province of Asia.”

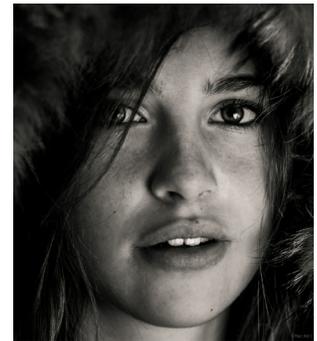
It is common for people to remember firsts. Matt Rohrbach was the first person I reached with the faith, through talking to him and handing him some literature. So obviously, I’ll always have a soft spot for Matt. “Greet Matt Rohrbach, my beloved, who is the firstfruit of the town of Willard, Ohio, for Christ.” Then Matt’s sister Marian believed, and she was the second-fruit of the town of Willard, for Christ. Twenty-five years has ensued, and no further members of the body of Christ have, to my knowledge, emerged from Willard, Ohio. It is all up for Willard, Ohio. God has finished with it for the eon. There are, however, about four-hundred churches in Willard—or so it seemed when I worked there for the Postal Service—so Satan has a long leash in that North-Central Ohio town.

MARY

I love Mary. I love her name. I’m partial to it. I love that she is in the body of Christ, and that she is listed here, and that she was special to Paul. Think about it: this woman is in the *Bible*. The same spirit that told us of the disruption of the world in Genesis 1:1 inspired this woman’s Biblical mention. It is just as important, therefore, that we know about Mary of Rome as it is that we know about the disruption of the world.

The first girl I fell in love with, when I was in the first grade, was named Mary. Please don’t laugh, because it is important and meaningful to me (it is another first) and it applies to the Mary from Rome. And yes, I fell in love with her. I knew about these things at age six.

Mary Rita Williams was petite—even for a six year-old. She had long, black hair. I worshipped her from near and afar for four years. In fourth grade, I got up the nerve to ask her to skate with me at Skateland. She said “yes.” Never has my right hand been sweatier or happier than holding the left hand of Mary Rita Williams. She was God. (This is a metaphor.) How does this apply to the topic at hand? The name has triggered me, and God uses such things; in fact, He uses everything.



I already knew at age six that I was supposed to be with a woman, and thus by extension God. No one taught me this. My parents had certainly not yet had “the talk” with me. It was pure instinct; purely human. God created Christ not only to create an image for Himself, but for fellowship. God doesn’t want to be lonely any more than we want it. All I knew, for four years, was that I needed to be close to Mary Rita Williams and thus by extension God. And I was. I have still not forgotten her. I already knew that Mary and her sort somehow completed me, just as God completes me.

Years later, God give me faith to become a member of the body of Christ. He gave me the spirit that caused me (not “allowed me”) to believe the evangel. The key word here, for me, is “member.” This meant that there were others. My first instinct was to seek out like-minded people. It was pure instinct; purely human. “First the soulish, afterwards that which is spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:46). Our soulish needs, given us by God, prepare us for the spiritual feelings. And yes, the spirit produces feelings. We are living souls. There are common denominators between these needs, such as proximity to other humans—to like-minded beings who complete us. For me, it started with Mary Rita Williams. She was my first conscious need. It ends with Mary of Rome. Both round out, for me, 1 Corinthians 15:46. Without one, there is not the other. I love them both, in different ways and at different times. The consistent thread between them is proximity—either in flesh, in spirit or both—to something greater than oneself.

“Greet Mary, who toils much for you.” If this woman toiled for the ecclesia at Rome, then she somehow toiled for us, who would come later. Because of the Romans, we have the letter from Paul explaining our justification from sin and our newfound peace with God. Because of Mary, we had the Roman ecclesia itself. She nurtured that group of saints.

ANDRONICUS & JUNIAS

If ever there were a masculine name for a man, it is Andronicus. This is a Greek name and it means, “MAN-CONQUEROR.” Junias is a little less impressive; it means “YOUTH.” This is why Andronicus is named first in the couplet. There is some question among commentators as to whether this ought to be



“Junia,” making it a woman and the wife of Andronicus. I’ll go with the *Concordant Version* here and say it’s a man. Besides, these two are said by Paul to be “notable among the apostles,” and we have no record of any women being apostles. The reasons for this are expressed in last month’s newsletter and the excerpts that I published there from my upcoming book, *Eve Raised*.

Paul calls Andronicus and Junias his relatives. Does he mean that they were literally from his family or extended family, or does he mean that they are simply Jews? I will go with the suggestive wording of Romans 9:3-4, where Paul writes—

For I myself wished to be anathema from Christ—for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, *who are Israelites*.

If Paul were speaking of his immediate family in Romans 9:3-4, he would hardly need to say that they “are Israelites.” So Andronicus and Junias were fellow Israelites only, it seems. More on this in a minute.

In what sense were these men Paul’s fellow captives? Most commentators think this means that the men were once in jail with Paul. I don’t think so. I think Paul means “captive” in the sense of being arrested by Christ for duty. Hadn’t Jesus Christ arrested Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus? He also arrested these men, though not quite as dramatically. He arrests us, though not quite as dramatically. But what is the difference, really? I have heard many of you say, “Once you get in this thing, you can’t get out.” Exactly right. I agree with you. So we are all captives of the gracious Christ, Who has deemed us worthy to serve in His army of slaves (Paul also called himself a slave of Christ in Romans 1:1); the slaves that carry the most important message that humanity can hear; the slaves that shall be immortalized and raised to celestial glory.



What does Paul mean when he says that Andronicus and Junias were “in Christ before [I] was”? Wasn’t Paul the first member of the body of Christ? Indeed. But A & J knew that Jesus Christ was the son of God before Saul/Paul did. They were worshipping Christ as Messiah while Paul was still out murdering Christians. A & J were probably lucky that Saul didn’t kill them during his

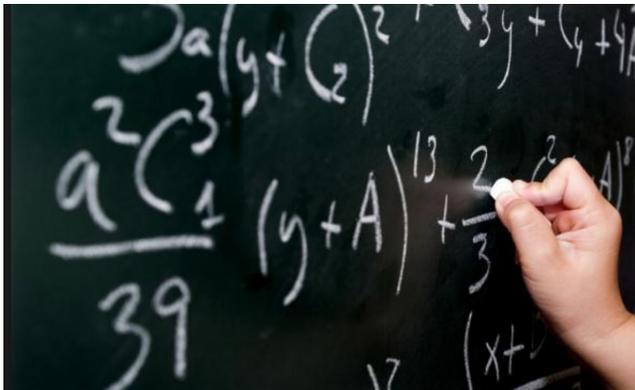
murderous/“arrest-all-Christians” spree. They probably heard of him and Paul might have been after them. That would have been a sparkling conversation in the latter days—A & J: “Paul, remember back in ‘40 when you were trying to kill us?” Paul: “Sorry about that.”

They are said to have “[come] to be in Christ” before Paul in anticipation of them jumping the Circumcision ship and joining the “new wave” Uncircumcision gospel. They couldn’t have latched on to the Uncircumcision gospel, obviously, before there was any such thing as an Uncircumcision gospel.

I love these people, all of them. That’s the bottom line, I think. —MZ

BONUS WRITING

HARD THINGS



A nun named Sister Clair taught me Algebra in high school—or tried to. Sister Clair had tight hair and stood in charge of everything on the square-black heels of her trade. And yet she had the face of any other human. Sister Clair became distant and sad one day while standing before a chalkboard in front of the same class that had purposely dropped pencils on the floor all at once to startle and nearly prematurely kill her substitute, Sister Sneed, who seemed to be ninety-five years old. Sister Clair had no choice but to be distant and sad. She told us about something awful that had just happened the night before to a loved one.

“My friend was killed in St. Louis last night,” said Sister Clair.

Sister Clair was still standing in charge of everything on those square heels, but she let her head and eyes wander out the window. She did not want to look at us. She was trying hard to keep a bitter thing inside of her from coming out.

“She was walking across the street with a friend,” Sister Clair said, “when she was hit by a car.”

Then something happened. Sister Clair became more human than ever. Forget the dark blue dress. Forget the shoes. Forget the cross. Forget the convent in the shade by the big tree. Forget life itself. God forgive us, please, for what we had done to Sister Sneed.

“And I guess...I guess they said that her brains spilled out all over the street.”

Then the eyes of Sister Clair met someone’s eyes, or all of our eyes, and the bitter thing inside of her came. Nothing moved then except Sister Clair’s right hand, and her hand moved with a crooked finger toward her chin, which was going down toward her chest. Then her shoulders heaved along the space of her grief, which was black. And she stood alone in front of the blackboard, heaving alone in her grief in a room filled with students.

I wrote about the John F. Kennedy assassination for Mrs. Lynch my junior year.

“Why didn’t Oswald shoot then (as the motorcade came toward him), into the sandy face of the president?”

I had written “into the sandy face” having never seen the sandy face. And I had never stood before the book boxes with Lee Harvey Oswald on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building. I had never aimed an Italian carbine, let alone ever heard a gunshot. Mrs. Lynch wrote on the first page of my report: “It was



painful to reread the story of the Kennedy assassination.” She cried like everyone else on November 22, 1963.

Kiss your children. Kiss them hard on the forehead. Notice the whorl that their hair makes on the back of their heads. Put your hands on either side of the whorl, pull down the hair to expose more of the whorl, then kiss the white skin in the middle where the whorl starts.

Children have delicate venous networks at their temples. Kiss those. Strip to the waist and lay the sandy head of a child on your chest between your breast and your shoulder. This is a place God made where the heads of children fit. Watch children sleep. Touch the pillow after they wake. It’s the warmest place. Bury your face into there and breathe it. Thank God that the skulls of children are at least hard enough to withstand falling off a bicycle as long as the skulls are protected inside helmets that cost more than forty dollars.

—Martin Zender