

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## What's in a Name?

Romans 16:1-16

2000

### Introduction

It has been described as the sweetest sound a person can hear.

It can have lifelong impact on the identity of an individual.

It is one of the most defining aspects of our lives.

Of course, I'm talking about our names.

As parents prepare for the arrival of a newborn, they pour over baby books and contemplate the virtually limitless combinations available -- and their meaning -- being particularly careful not to saddle their child with an embarrassing name and at the same time hoping and praying that the name and its meaning will give the child something to aspire to.

My parents named me Robert Brian Hallman

Robert Brian = "Bright and shining star"

My family obviously had high expectations for my life. That is until the day at my grandfather's funeral, when at age 7, I mistakenly signed my name in the guest book as "Robert *Brain* Hallman" At that moment everyone in my family accepted the irrevocable and disappointing truth that they had made a tragic mistake -- instead of "bright and shining star" they were going to have to settle for "Falling Star."

This passage of scripture is one of the most extensive and intimate expressions of love and appreciation found in the New Testament. Paul's comments about these individuals, many of whom remain little known today, are remarkable in that he takes time to speak so warmly and appreciatively of these "ordinary" Christians. He reveals his love for the community of the redeemed, his mutual accountability with them before God, and his dependence on them for his own ministry and for his own well-being.

### I Paul's Personal Commendation

There are 24 names mentioned by Paul in this text. It is worth noting that 7 are women -- quite remarkable considering the low estate of women in that day.

### Illustration:

Interestingly, God privileged women to witness some of the most pivotal events recorded in the New Testament:

1. The announcement of the Messiah came not to Joseph, but to Mary.
2. Frequently Jesus pointed out women as examples of true devotion and love.
4. It was to the woman at the well that Jesus first claimed to be the Messiah.
3. The resurrection of Jesus was first witnessed not by Peter, James or John, but by Mary Magdalene.

A. Paul describes Phoebe's ministry: [Verse 1-2]

**Commend** = Sunistao = "To introduce (favorably), introduce, affirm"

**Phoebe (foy'-bay)** = "Bright and radiant"

It is believed that Phoebe was the one chosen to deliver Paul's letter to the church at Rome. Anyone would have been highly honored to carry and deliver such a letter. Yet out of all the thousands of devoted followers of Christ, Paul chose Phoebe to deliver what is unquestionably the most important and systematic explanation of salvation found anywhere in the Bible.

1. A sister to Paul

Ephesians 2:19 "... you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."

Matt 12:50 "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

2. A servant of the church in Cenchrea

**Cenchrea** = Keng-khreh-a'-hee

Cenchreae was the port of Corinth, located about 9 miles east of the city.

**Servant** = Diakonos = A gender-neutral term meaning "menial servant"

But it also refers to the office of deacon within the church - 1 Tim 3:10, 13

In the early church, female deacons were responsible to:

1. Care for fellow believers who were sick
2. Care for the poor
3. Care for strangers who needed hospitality
4. Care for the imprisoned
5. Instruct and disciple new female converts and children
6. Instruct young women on how to love their husbands and children.

B. Paul gives instructions regarding Phoebe:

1. Receive her in the Lord

**Receive** = Prosdechomai = "To accept"

a. In a way worthy of the saints

In other words, as a true and faithful believer.

**Application:**

As believers, we are to receive, to love, and to minister to one another in a way that reflects the heart of God.

Matthew 25:40 "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

2. Give her any help she may need

Paul exhorts the believers in Rome to provide her with whatever she needed -- food, lodging and even escort through dangerous areas.

a. For she has been a great help to many people including Paul

**Help** = Prostatís = “A patroness, or assistant:

Apparently, Phoebe was a woman of means who financially supported the church. But instead of expending her resources on luxurious living, she used her influence, time, resources and personal effort to further the kingdom of God.

## II Paul’s Personal Greetings

**Greet** = Aspazomai = “To enfold in the arms or to embrace”

### A. Priscilla and Aquila [Verse 3-5a]

The first mention of this Jewish couple is found in Acts 18 where Paul met them on his first visit to Corinth. Evidently, Priscilla and Aquila had fled from Rome when all Jews were expelled by Emperor Claudias during the frequent waves of persecution. Paul shared a number of common interests that brought them into a quick and lasting friendship.

First, they were committed believers

Second, they were tentmakers as Paul was.

Third, they were capable teachers of the Word

Fourth, they were gifted in leadership

They were also hospitable, offering their house as a base of operations for Paul during his stay in Corinth – Acts 18:1-3

### **Application:**

The people I am closest to and spend the most time with are those who are co-laborers in Christ and are aggressively working for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Later, Priscilla and Aquila moved from Corinth to Ephesus where they met Apollos who was a powerful preacher but who did not have a full understanding of the gospel. It was Priscilla and Aquila who took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately – Acts 18:24-26

Luke tells us that after two years there, Paul left to go to Ephesus, and Priscilla and Aquila went with him. Again, they took up the trade of tentmaking and again they opened up a church in their home.

1. Paul’s fellow workers in Christ Jesus

**Fellow workers** = Sunergos = “A co-laborer”

They were Paul’s co-workers in both trade and faith.

2. They risked their lives for Paul

**Risked** = Laid down their own neck

**Trachelos** = “The throat (neck)”

**Hupotithemi** = “To place underneath, to put in hazard’s way”

We don't have record of the circumstances that Paul is referring to, but anyone that was around Paul any length of time and considered themselves a true friend, would eventually find themselves having to rescue Paul from danger! (2 Cor 11:23-28)

3. Paul expresses his gratitude to them
4. Paul expresses his greetings to the church at their house

B. Epenetus [Verse 5b]

**Epainetos** (*ep-a'-hee-net-os*) = "Praised"

1. A dear friend of Paul

**Dear friend** = Agapetos = "Beloved"

A deeply loved friend

2. The first convert to Christ in Asia

**First convert** = Aparche = "A first-fruit"

This is likely the reason that Paul loved Epainetos so deeply – he was Paul's first convert, or first fruit in Asia. He was a part of Paul's priestly offerings that we spoke of last week in Rom 15:16.

**Illustration:**

If you have ever led someone to Jesus Christ, it is an experience you are unlikely to forget. That first convert, hopefully the first fruit of a lifetime of harvesting, often holds a special place in the heart of a servant of God.

C. Mary [Verse 6]

**Mary** = From Meriy = "Bitter or rebellious"

There are 6 different Mary's mentioned in the NT. But this particular Mary we know nothing about except what Paul shares with us in this brief verse.

1. She worked very hard for the Roman believers

**Worked hard** = Kopiao = "To work to the point of weariness or exhaustion"

Obviously, Mary had the gift of helps. She could not teach or preach or evangelize, but she could work hard -- and she did!

D. Andronicus and Junias [Verse 7]

**Andronicus** = An-dron'-ee-kos = Compound name meaning "triumph or victory"

**Junias** = Iounias (ee-oo-nee'-as)

It is hard to tell whether this is a husband and wife team, or two brothers. It all depends on the name "Junias." If it is "Junias" with an "s," as we have it here, it is a male; if it is "Junia," as the King James Version has it, it is female. But whoever they were, they were ...

1. Relatives of Paul

**Relative** = Suggenes = "A blood relative"

2. Imprisoned with Paul

Along with many others, Andronicus and Junias were imprisoned for their bold and uncompromising stand for Christ. There is probably no better place to make friends than in jail. You have to get to know your fellow-inmates -- there is no escaping them!

3. Outstanding among the apostles

**Outstanding** = Episemos = “Remarkable or notable”

Evidently, even the twelve apostles in Jerusalem held them in high regard.

4. They were in Christ before Paul

In other words, they came to a saving knowledge of Christ prior to Paul’s conversion. They may have previously been persecuted by Paul before his astonishing encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. No doubt, it was the prayers of men and women like Andronicus and Junias that had a significant influence in Paul’s eventual conversion to Christ.

E. Ampliatus [Verse 8]

**Amplias (am-plee'-as)** = “To be enlarged or to make great”

In the cemetery in the catacombs in Rome, there is a highly decorated tomb with the single name "Ampliatius," written on it. A single name like this implies that the man was a slave, but as the tomb is rather ornate, it indicates that he was a Christian, and highly respected by the leaders in Rome. We can’t be sure that he was the same person Paul mentions here, but if he was, it highlights the fact that regardless of our social standing in this world, we can be great in the kingdom of God.

1. Loved by Paul in the Lord

**Loved** = Agapetos = “Beloved”

F. Urbanas and Stachys [Verse 9]

**Ourbanos (oor-ban-os')** = “Of the city” A common Roman name.

**Stachus (stakh'-oos)** = “A head of grain or ear of corn”

We know nothing about them except what Paul reveals in this brief verse.

1. Paul’s fellow workers in Christ

**Fellow workers** = Sunergos = “A co-laborer”

**Loved** = Agapetos = “Beloved”

G. Apelles [Verse 10a]

**Apelles (ap-el-lace')**

Again, as with others listed in this passage, we know nothing about Apelles beyond what Paul’s reveals in this verse.

1. Tested and approved in Christ

**Tested and approved** = Dokimos = “Acceptable or approved”

This word has the idea of being tried and tested and was used of precious metals such as gold or silver that had to pass the test of purity.

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

H. The household of Aristobulus [Verse 10b]

*Aristobulus* = Compound meaning ‘good counsel or advice’

Dr. William Barclay tells us that Aristobulus may have been the grandson of King Herod the Great, who lived in Rome.

If so, it means that even in the royal household there were a number of Christian servants and slaves who exercised great influence on the leaders of Rome -- even the emperor himself.

I. Herodian [Verse 11a]

*Herodion (hay-ro-dee'-ohn)* = “Hero or heroic”

1. Paul’s relative

*Relative* = Suggenes = “A blood relative”

As with Andronicus and Junias, Herodian was Paul’s blood relative.

J. The household of Narcissus [Verse 11b]

*Narkissos (nar'-kis-sos)* = “A flower -- from narke ("narcotic")”

Scholars believe that he was a former slave who later became Emperor Claudias’ secretary. If this is so, he would have been extremely wealthy and influential.

K. Tryphena and Tryphosa [Verse 12a]

*Truphaina (troo'-fahee-nah)* = “Delicate”

*Truphosa (troo-fo'-sah)* = “Dainty”

These women were likely twin sisters.

1. Women who work hard in the Lord

*Worked hard* = Kopiaio = “To work to the point of weariness”

When Paul wrote this he probably smiled to himself, for their names mean "dainty" and "delicate" -- yet they were hard workers. Their names suggest that they were probably aristocrats, women who were born into wealth and high social standing. And yet they gladly rolled up their sleeves in diligent, sweaty service to the Lord and His church.

L. Persis [Verse 12b]

*Persis (per-sece')* = “A Persian woman”

1. A woman who worked very hard in the Lord

*Worked hard* = Kopiaio = “To work to the point of weariness”

Her hard work is mentioned in the past tense, meaning that she was likely an older woman in the Lord who had already lived her most productive years.

M. Rufus and his mother [Verse 13]

**Rhouphos (hroo'-fos)** = “Red”

There seems to be little doubt that Rufus, along with his brother Alexander were the sons of Simon of Cyrene. In Mark 15:21 we are told that as our Lord was making his way down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, on his way to the cross, he was so weak from loss of blood that he tripped and fell. The Roman soldiers grabbed a passing stranger and compelled him to bear the cross to Calvary. That man was Simon of Cyrene, a Jew coming into the city for the Passover. His home was in North Africa, and he evidently had little or no interest in the things of Christ until he was forced to carry the cross of Jesus. Though we do not know the details, it is evident that this man became a Christian and likely led his two sons, Alexander and Rufus, to the Lord. And in time, they became outstanding men in the Christian community.

1. He was chosen in the Lord

**Chosen** = Eklektos = “Elect”

From the context, it is clear that this is not reference to election. Rather, Paul is emphasizing that Rufus was an extraordinary Christian, known for his love and his work for the Lord and for the Lord’s people.

2. His mother was a mother to Paul

N. Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas [Verse 14]

**Asugkritos (as-oong'-kree-tos)** = “Incomparable”

**Phlegon (fleg'-one)** = “Blazing”

**Hermes (her-mace')** = “The name of the messenger of the Greek deities”

**Patrobas (pat-rob'-as)** = “Father's life”

Greek names, suggesting that these were young businessmen who had come to Rome and were close friends.

O. Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olyumpas [Verse 15]

**Philologos (fil-ol'-og-os)** = “Fond of words, i.e. talkative”

Philologus means “a lover of the word.” What a wonderful name!!

**Nereus (nare-yoos')** = “Wet”

Nereus is another fascinating name. Dr. Barclay suggests that he may have been the housekeeper of a prominent Roman citizen named Flavius Clemens, later to become Consul of Rome, the highest political office in the city in 95 A.D. Flavius was later condemned to death by the Emperor Domitian because he was a Christian. There is evidence to suggest that in the household of Flavius there was a Christian slave named Nereus, who was a great influence in leading this prominent Roman citizen to Christ, and who would later give his life as a martyr for Christ.

We can see from these names that Roman society had already been infiltrated by the vibrant, committed believers before Paul ever arrived in the city. That is why, at the beginning of this letter, he says, their "faith is being reported all over the world," (Rom 1:8). These prominent Christians had penetrated Roman society with the gospel from top to bottom.

*Olumpas (ol-oom-pas')* = "Descended from heaven"

## II Paul's Personal Request

A. Greet one another with a holy kiss [Verse 16]

The practice of embracing and kissing family and friends on the forehead or cheek was common in Old and New Testament times.

But because many believers were rejected and disowned by their own families upon conversion, the spiritual family of God became all the more precious and valuable to them and they treated the body of Christ as their own family.

Mark 10:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

B. Receive the greetings from all the churches of Christ

## Conclusion:

What's in a name?

Rev 3:11-13 "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name."