

PAUL-WHO MAY HAVE HAD A WONDERFUL SISTER

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Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me (Rom. 16:7).

The epistle to the Romans is widely recognized as one of the most important letters written by Paul. It is constructive, corrective, and at its conclusion, intensely appreciative. If the eleventh chapter of Hebrews can be called "God's Art Gallery of Faith," the sixteenth chapter of Romans may be named "Paul's Album of Special Friends." The apostle specially mentioned twenty-nine people. Probably many of these met Paul during his missionary journeys and who for reasons unknown, were then residing in Rome. The apostle, who planned to visit the imperial city, did not wish to leave anyone out of his letter and sent greetings to his special friends.

His reference to Andronicus and Junia has caused endless discussion among the churches. He also said Herodion was a kinsman (see Rom. 16:11). Some commentators have expressed the opinion these people were Jews, but that is difficult to accept since the others cited were also Hebrews. It would be strange if they were all merely Jews when Paul only named three as members of his family. The apostle had a sister and nephew who were either residents of Jerusalem or visiting the city when his life was being threatened (see Acts 23:16).

Whether Junia was a sister, cousin, or a distant relative does not alter the fact this person was related to the apostle. The fact that Paul had a sister in Jerusalem supports the idea that he stayed in her home during the time when he was one of Gamaliel's students.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer believed the lady and her son might have been on vacation in the city when the lad informed the officer of the plot to murder his uncle. Some teachers believe the two people to whom Paul sent greetings were men, cousins of the apostle, but as Matthew Henry states in his commentary, "Junia could have been a feminine name, and consequently

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might have been the wife of Andronicus." That they were won for Christ ahead of Paul suggests they may have been converted when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. During that feast eight thousand people were accepted into the family of God, and Andronicus and his wife could have been among that number.

A Pardon Accepted... "In Christ"

It is evident that these people were won for Christ early in the history of the church. The apostle Paul, who then was known as Saul of Tarsus, was later converted outside of the gate of Damascus where he had gone to apprehend Christians. Luke described that event in what is now known as the ninth chapter of the Acts. Paul's sister was a devout Jewess who probably provided a home in which her student brother stayed. It has been assumed that since Saul was never mentioned in the Gospels, he had graduated and returned to Tarsus. Later he came back to Jerusalem to receive a commission from the high priest to search for, and arrest, Christians who had fled to Damascus.

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It can only be imagined how this grieved his sister. When the usual routine of the festival was rudely interrupted by the followers of Jesus, the city was in an uproar. The disciples were fearlessly preaching in the streets, and huge congregations were enthralled by their powerful messages concerning the resurrection of Jesus. A tremendous impact was being made on the minds of great crowds, and the news of the healing of the beggar at the gate of the temple increased the excitement. The situation was completely out of control, and the rulers of the city were unable to end the disturbance.

Perhaps that was when Andronicus and Junia first heard the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. Their souls were stirred, and as Paul said, "They were in Christ before me. The grace of God did in a moment what the law was unable to do in a lifetime. When a person intelligently believed Christ was the only Savior, that convert immediately became a member of the family of God. The sacrifices and ministry of the priests were no longer required, for Christ was able to

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supply the needs of all who trusted Him. This teaching contradicted everything taught in Israel, and the anger of the rabbis was quickly aroused. It was widely reported that many of the priests had embraced the new ideas, and for a while it appeared Judaism had received a deathblow. Andronicus and Junia evidently became prominent in the new movement, for Paul indicated in his letter that the activities of this couple attracted the attention of the apostles. It is not known how this was accomplished, but it might have been through their courageous testimony or spontaneous giving to help believers in need. The apostle wrote: "They were of note among the apostles." There were at least eight thousand new converts, but these special people were "not lost in the crowd" - they were outstanding.

A Prayer Answered ... "In Christ BEFORE ME"

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).

When a Christian is in the midst of a storm, it is difficult to believe every cloud has a silver lining. It is hard to be joyful when prayers remain unanswered, and God seems to ignore

the grief of His children. The thrills of Pentecost had become memories, for fierce persecution was threatening the lives of the disciples. Stephen, a brilliant young believer, was being stoned to death, and watching every movement was another man at whose feet the clothing of the martyr had fallen. "And Saul was consenting unto his death" (see Acts 8:1). That was only an insignificant shower compared with the hurricane which followed. Luke described the horrors of those days when he wrote: "And at that time, there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the region of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

What appeared to be a fatal blow to the church proved to

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be one of God's greatest blessings. The fierce persecution transformed ordinary believers into itinerant evangelists. The people who were compelled to leave homes and friends went everywhere preaching the Gospel. Somewhere in the area were Paul's kinsmen who fervently loved the Lord. It would be informative to learn what they thought and said when they discovered their relative was responsible for their suffering. Were they ashamed and filled with resentment?

It is written that "Saul made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). The word translated havock is elumaine-to; it suggests a wild pig using its snout to uproot young plants in a vineyard. The Englishmen 'S Greek Testament translates the verse: "But Saul was ravaging the assembly, house by house entering, and dragging men and women, delivered them up to prison." The Christians were pulled through the streets to be thrown into dungeons. That terrible predicament was vastly different from the ecstatic scenes witnessed on the Day of Pentecost. Saul resembled a wild boar uprooting God's garden and had become an instrument of brutality and murder. The terrible situation caused grief to Saul's family who wondered what could prevent further infamy. They prayed, and their intercession played an important part in the miracle which followed. The persecutor became a preacher of the message he had tried to destroy. Every Christian should learn from this account that it pays to pray.

A Passion Acknowledged ... "Who are of note among the apostles"

Solomon said: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22:1). It is not known when the king of Israel wrote these words, but his experiences verified the accuracy of his statement. He possessed wealth and wisdom, but his conduct tarnished his reputation. Blessed is the man who stays close to God, for he "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (see Ps. 91:1).

Every pastor knows the members who are worthy of trust

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within his church. The people known to Narcissus were "in the Lord." Tryphona and Tryphene "Laboured in the Lord." The beloved Persis "Laboured much in the Lord." This is true of every assembly. The majority of church people claim to be Christians, but they seldom do anything for the Savior. They attend services infrequently, place a gift on the offering plate, and take a week's leave of absence after every Sunday morning service. They never manifest interest in the continuing work of evangelism, but if their faith were challenged, they would be annoyed.

There are other people in the assembly who have a genuine concern for the work of Christ, but they dislike responsibility, for they have many irons in their fire! They enjoy bowling a few nights a week, serve on several committees. and are busy in many areas of activity. These people are willing to assist in any church related program if the effort will not be too time consuming and can be fitted into the regular routine of the week. They are willing to help, but please do not ask too often! It will be difficult to add to the weekly schedule.

Finally, there may be found in every church, members who are the life of the place. They do what is necessary and never complain nor make excuses. These people obey the text which

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says: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). Often these

faithful souls are the first to arrive in church and the last to leave. They dislike publicity, but if anything worthwhile is going on, somewhere in the background these saints will be working hard to make the project a success. They belong to "The Beloved Persis Committee," and are devoted helpers of all who need assistance. Such people are easily recognized in a small group but difficult to find in a large crowd. Yet in the early church where for a time at least there were eight thousand members, Andronicus and Junia were prominent, and even the twelve apostles were aware of their service for Christ. It would have been enlightening if either Luke or Paul had supplied additional details about these wonderful workers. The fact that they were not "needles hidden in a haystack" says

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much for their faithfulness which was recognized throughout the city.

A Partnership Appreciated... "My fellow prisoners"

Someone has said: "The man worthwhile is the man who can smile when everything goes dead wrong." There are occasions when "fair weather Christians" lose their fervor in storms! Andronicus and Junia had committed themselves to the Lord, and their devotion prevailed when persecution destroyed their liberty. There was a time during the ministry of the Lord when some of His listeners did not like what He said, and made that an excuse for deserting Him (John 6:66). Others, although they did not understand His message, refused to leave.

It is not known whether Andronicus and Junia were imprisoned with Paul, or if they had been incarcerated in another place, and so were called "fellow prisoners." The great missionary had been arrested on several occasions. Writing to the Corinthians he said he had been "in prison more frequent" (see 2 Cor. 11:23). Accused people were sometimes given the opportunity to recant, but true Christians rejected the opportunity, preferring to suffer with Christ than to enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season" (see Heb. 11:25). Paul appreciated the courage of his kinsmen and expressed admiration when he wrote his letter to the Romans.

We should never forget the debt owed to the early Christians whose blood became the seed of the church. They left behind an example that all believers should emulate. Without the influence of those pioneers, we would be without the church, the Bible, and hope for eternity. The people of a bygone age gave us a treasure that must never be lost. It was because of their unending dedication we now sing:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus's name.
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

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