

The Apostle Paul's Mother

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

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- A. In the days of the early church, a heathen scholar in Antioch, heard of Anthusa, a godly woman and the mother of John Chrysostom, and threw up his hands and cried: "What women these Christians have!"
1. In the closing chapter of the book of Romans, Paul pays tribute to one who had proven herself to be a godly mother toward him personally.
- B. Rom. 16:13 - "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."
Who was she?
1. Her name is never mentioned; on the surface there seems to be nothing outstanding about her.
 - a. She was not like Priscilla, who worked alongside of her husband.
 - b. Or like Lydia, who had an aptitude for business.
 - c. Or like Phoebe, the helper of the church
 2. Perhaps she was a homemaker whose kindness and hospitality moved God to inspire the Holy Spirit to guide the apostle Paul to remember her in writing for eternity.
 3. Rufus and his mother were well known to the church. She was the mother of a man Paul calls "chosen," the mother of Alexander the evangelist, and the wife of Simon of Cyrene, the man compelled to carry Jesus' cross. (Mark 15:21)
 4. In all likelihood, her family fled Jerusalem during the persecution by Saul of Tarsus in Acts 8. If that is the case, it is ironic that the woman Paul drove from her home in Judea became a mother to the apostle Paul. That is how Christian forgiveness works.
 5. Rufus' father, Simon, was originally from the country of Libya and the city of Cyrene, an area today called Tripoli in North Africa. He may have been a Jew from one of the colonies of Jews created by Alexander the Great, or he may have been a native who became a proselyte Jew, in which case he would have been a black North African.
 6. There were some Cyrenaic Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9) who later converted to Christ and went to Antioch and worked with Paul preaching the Gospel (Acts 13:1). Simon called Niger (the Black) and Lucius of Cyrene was among them, very possibly the same Simon the Cyrene, father of Rufus, and husband of the woman Paul called mother.
 7. What a family this must have been! The father carried Jesus' cross and worked with Paul in Antioch, the brothers were fellow Gospel preachers, and the wife and mother that a 50-something apostle called Mom.

I. A GODLY MOTHER'S LEGACY

- A. Christian mothers can leave a lasting legacy for their children and for all of their children's friends - Prov. 31:10, 15, 20-21, 25-28, 11:16; 2Tim. 1:5

1. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Oh Mother, Mother, if you had not been the woman you were, I would not have been the man that I am."
2. Campbell Morgan wrote in his autobiography: "I have four sons, and all of them grew up to become preachers like their father. One day as the family was gathered together, my youngest son, Howard asked me, 'Dad, Who is the greatest preacher in this family?' I looked hard at each one of them in turn, smiled, and said, 'Your Mother.'"

II. PAUL'S MOTHER IN THE FLESH

- A. Was she really the mother of the apostle Paul? Highly unlikely
 1. When Paul obeyed the Gospel, he was abandoned or opposed by all in Judaism, including those who knew him - Acts 9:22-26
 2. Paul's family were devout Pharisees of the militant tribe of Benjamin who carefully followed the Law of Moses from his birth - Phil. 3:4-8
 3. Paul did not speak of his family in the flesh in 14 epistles; however, he greeted his Christian family with great affection.
 4. Only Paul's nephew seemed to keep contact with him - Acts 23:16
 - a. Clearly some of Paul's family was living in Jerusalem.
 5. We can reason that Paul chose Christ over his family; and that to his family, his conversion to Christ made him as good as dead in their eyes. This would include his mother in the flesh.

III. PAUL'S MOTHERS IN THE FAITH

- A. Mark 10:29-30, 3:31-35
 1. Older sisters in the faith are to be treated as mothers - 1Tim. 5:1-2
- B. Every honest man knows that while Dad may be the head of the house, Mom is the heart of the home.
 1. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth in 56 AD (Acts 20:1-3), about 20 years after his conversion to Christ (Acts 9). (Jack Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Peabody, ME: Hendrickson, 1998, p. 395)
 2. Sometime and somewhere in those 20 years and thousands of miles of Paul's journeys (possibly Antioch), an older sister in Christ showed kindness and hospitality to the apostle Paul to the extent that the Holy Spirit guided him to call her Mom.
 3. We assume that the commands to practice hospitality are for Christian men, and indeed they are; but, it is the Christian women who put their hands to the task in a manner that is remembered fondly - Heb. 6:10
 4. Perhaps she nursed him back to health after one of his beatings or stoning (2Cor. 11:24-25; Gal. 6:17)
 5. Perhaps she encouraged him as a mother would a son when his brow was furrowed with anxiety for the churches under his care (2Cor. 11:28)
 6. Perhaps when Paul was abandoned or opposed by his own brethren that he remembered a motherly older sister who loved him unconditionally (2Tim. 4:9-18)
- D. Reflections: We all recall learning love as children in the encircling arms of our own mothers. But as adult Christians, we have beloved memories of very

special, godly, older sisters who viewed us as if we were their own children who needed tender affection and care in a safe, tender relationship.

1. I am a few years older than the apostle Paul was when he wrote the greeting to Rufus' mother. And it takes nothing away from my own mother's love to say that I cherish the love and kindness of my many other mothers in the faith.

Conclusion:

- A. Much has been said and written about the power of a godly mother
 1. "No man is poor who has a Godly mother." (Abraham Lincoln)
 2. "My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her." (George Washington)
- B. Rom. 16:13 - "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."
 1. Prov. 31:28 - "Her children rise up and call her blessed"