

## Romans 16:17-20 "Beware of Those Who Teach Falsehood In The Church"

My plans for this morning were to wrap up our study in Romans. It turns out God had other plans. And so we'll go with His plan to wrap up next week.

But I would like to give you just a brief overview of where we've been in this letter. Paul has covered a lot of ground in this letter, from the sinfulness of man, which is a natural outworking of his unregenerate state, to our justification which Jesus accomplished on our behalf through His sacrificial death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

Paul spent a good deal of time addressing the Jews as a nation, who have been cut off from the vine of God's grace because of their rebellion but all Jews are promised a grafting back in if they do not continue in their unbelief.

Through their cutting off the Gentiles have been grafted in and share in the Kingdom of God through Christ to where both groups In Christ are now part of the commonwealth of Israel called the church, which Paul describes as the "Israel of God in Gal.6:15-16.

In this letter Paul also teaches on the practical aspect of our walk with Christ and in Rom 12:1-2 we read, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual [Or reasonable] act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."

He then goes on to explain how our love for one another will allow differences of opinion on matters which fall into the arena of liberty in Christ.

The Christians in Rome were commended for their love and faithfulness to Jesus Christ and this is one reason Paul wanted to go to Rome, to share in their joy and be refreshed in their love.

He gives them a list of people he's met over the years, some of whom he may have ministered with, and leaves them with the encouragement to greet one another with a holy kiss.

That would probably have been a natural place to end this letter, but Paul knows that we don't live in a perfect world and that the enemy of God would do anything to pervert and destroy the Body of Christ.

And so, in almost an after-thought gesture, Paul reminds them of reality and encourages them to keep guard and be vigilant in their pursuit of the things of God so that deception will not creep into their midst. And this is where we pick up this morning.

Rom 16:17 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."

There is an attitude in the church today which fosters a hands-off approach to people who may be a detriment to the Body of Christ. It stems from an unbiblical view that we should never judge anyone with regard to anything.

As we studied through this letter we found that judgments of other people are to be avoided, but only in regard to those areas where we have liberties in Christ which don't compromise the truth of God's word and His salvation.

On numerous occasions in the word of God judgments are frequently made because of people who are attempting to destroy the foundation of our faith found in Christ, and who would try to pervert the pure means of growing in our faith, which is through the grace given us by God, coupled with the word of God which is totally sufficient for our growth.

In fact, it's when we attempt to integrate the wisdom of the world to bolster our sanctification, with the word of God, where we come up with a hybrid, anemic and insufficient system which actually undermines God's true means for our sanctification.

We know what that true means of sanctification is because Jesus Himself tells us what that is in Joh 17:17, as He prays to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

To try to accomplish God's sanctification in any other way flies in the face of what Jesus deems sufficient. Whether it's psychology, 12 step programs, New Age thought or a reworking of the Bible, it is man's attempt to accomplish God's work.

A similar problem reared its ugly head in the church of Galatia. Paul addressed that problem and said in Gal 3:3 "Are you so

foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

Paul is cutting that attitude off at the pass as he addresses these Christians in Rome. Let's look at it.

Rom 16:17 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."

Paul urges these Christians to watch out for those who cause divisions. The phrase "watch out" in the Greek is *skopeo* and it is literally translated, to take aim at; 'train your eye on them; scope them out.'

The idea here is not to turn the other way. Take notice and take action. Why? Because divisions and obstacles in the form of false teachings and attitudes eat away at the fabric of the truth found in God's word.

And once the foundation has been undermined and left unchecked, it's only a matter of time before that foundation crumbles. If you think that's an overstatement you need only look at some of the mainline denominations who started out as godly but who have, in some cases, even denied the Savior through their acceptance of heresy.

The NAS puts verse 17 this way. "...Keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned..."

"Dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching." What teaching? The teaching delivered from the prophets and apostles. In other words, the word of God.

When the word of God is not taught and held to then falsehood will automatically begin to cause dissensions and hindrances and they will eventually give way to the truth if not checked. And what happens at that point is the falsehood becomes the norm and accepted as truth.

This is why some denominations teach that the word of God is not necessarily the whole truth. Some teach that Jesus Himself is not necessarily God in the flesh, or that He did not come to pay for sin as much as He came to be an example for us to follow.

You've heard of the schools Princeton, Yale and Harvard. In the beginning they all trained men to become Pastors and Theologians.

If you wanted to go to Divinity school in the 17th and 18th centuries they were the ones who held the truth of Jesus Christ and His word very high.

No longer. They still have classes on religion, but they mock the One true God. It can and does happen. Paul was always warning the church in this regard. And keep in mind he wrote between 20 and 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1Ti 1:3-4 "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith."

The apostle Peter addresses this problem as well.

2Pe 2:1-2 "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute."

Speaking of the last days Jesus Himself says in Mat 24:10-11 "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

The problem of false teaching and false teachers is not some dreamed up bogey man in the mind of a paranoid Christian fanatic. This is a real problem which should be dealt with seriously for the sake of Body of Christ.

How do we know if anything is contrary to the teaching of the word of God? The way we know is by studying the word of God and teaching the word of God, handling accurately the word of truth.

What if someone is not handling accurately the word and is promoting a teaching which is contrary to the truth? Paul's answer: "turn away from them.", or as the NIV puts it, "Keep away from them."

'Boy, that sounds cruel.' Keep in mind that this doesn't preclude the command to go to a brother or sister who is sinning and try to

win him back. Often times, false teaching is innocently promoted through ignorance.

But, what Paul is referring to here is after having gone through the steps of confronting the problem and running into an unteachable spirit with regards to the truth there is a Biblical mandate which will put that person on alert, and in the process, allowing the Body of Christ to be informed of the problem.

The intention here is to make it public. And the reason for that is two-fold.

- 1) To protect the flock and identify the person in question.
- 2) To ultimately restore the person in question if in fact they are willing to submit to the leaders of that particular church which infers submitting to the truth of God's word.

You mean that if a person is unwilling to turn from his sin and false teaching as he or she desires to promote it in the Body we should physically have nothing to do with them? That's exactly what Paul says. That simply means we do not have fellowship with them. It doesn't mean we aren't open to receive them back as they are willing to repent.

But, to keep them in the same status as people who want to promote the truth is to do the church a disservice as well as that person. 'But, Drew that sounds heartless to have nothing to do with them under the circumstances. I've known this person for years.'

That may be true, but God's knows what's best for the church and that person.

2Th 3:14 "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed."

Tit 3:10 "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him."

God takes the reality of how His teaching will affect you for eternity. And for that reason we should take it seriously as well.

Listen to what Paul tells the Galatians.

Gal 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say

again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

That sounds pretty serious. And it is. We're told not to add to or take away from the word of God. But unless we're discerning to what types of false teachings are out there we'll flit from one teaching to the other and we'll never be grounded and we'll never grow, and worse, we may find ourselves actually working against God's will.

This is why, in God's grace, He has given us people whom He has gifted in certain areas so we may be encouraged and instructed in the truth.

Eph 4:11-15 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

You see, there is a reason for us to grow in Christ in the truth of His word, and that is so that we may be prepared for works of service. Works for God. The Body of Christ will never get on with the work if it's always contending with dissensions and stumbling blocks in the form of false teaching.

I know it's hard to believe but there are people out there who operate with selfish motives when it comes to the things of God. And so Paul continues in our text.

Rom 16:18 "For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

The word naive in the Greek could be literally translated, innocent; unsuspecting. Who would normally suspect that someone would try to deceive us if they claim to be Christians wanting to promote the truth?

And yet it happens. We must be on guard. To the elders in Ephesus Paul said in Act 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and

all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

And though a great deal of responsibility falls on the leadership of the church to guide and protect the flock, each individual must also be responsible for seeking the truth so that he will not fall prey to false teaching.

We see this in Act 17:11 "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Now we need to understand that we must be responsible to guard our lives from the intrusion of the world's thinking and from false teaching even within the church, but we don't have to be paranoid either.

If we're faithful to seek God and His truth His Spirit will guide us into all truth. What's comforting to know is that Jesus is infinitely more concerned about my growth than even I am. And because of that He's always leading and guiding.

I like what Peter writes in 1Pe 2:24-25 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Yes, Christ has appointed overseers or elders to watch and protect the flock, but here we see that Jesus himself is our Almighty overseer or guardian and Shepherd.

He is ever watching and protecting us. I've almost completed a book by Ron Rhodes called "Angels among us". And he takes a biblical look at how God's messengers, His angels, protect us and direct us even when we don't know it.

He has the whole host of heaven at our disposal as He uses His angels to accomplish His will to watch over us. Of course God doesn't need angels to accomplish this, He is Almighty, but He has thought enough of you and me to appoint these heavenly beings to be there for us.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in Heb 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

We're not in this on our own gang. We have support from the Most High God in Heaven part of which includes Him giving us His angels to serve us.

This is a short warning to the Christians in Rome. Three verses... 17 - 19. And part of the reason is that they were faithful to God and His word. But no one is above being deceived. And so even a short warning can be very effective.

But then he goes on in Rom 16:19 "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

Paul is joyous over their obedience, but a final warning. "I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and as we desire to be wise we must consider the things of God. As we consider Him and seek Him we will grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

But, evil is ever lurking to cause us to stumble. When it comes to the deceitfulness of falsehood we must be mature and aware of the evil and avoid it, even exposing it. And as we take this attitude we will be innocent of pursuing it. This is what Paul means in verse 19.

He puts it in a similar way when writing to the Corinthians.

1Co 14:20 "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."

Jesus Himself warns us this way.

Mat 10:16 "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

We live in a real world with real enemies of the cross, not the least of whom is Satan himself. But we have weapons not fashioned with human hands, but rather are fashioned with the Divine hand of God, so that we may overcome, because He overcame for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The battle belongs to God. Never forget that. Don't ever think we can engage the enemy in our own strength.

2Ch 20:15 "He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not

be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's."

He simply tells us to follow Him into battle. The victory is His and He will give it to us for His glory.

Rom 16:20 "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

This is language reminiscent of the first gospel preached to mankind back in the Garden of Eden after the fall of man because of his sin. God pronounced judgment on Satan, together with the woman and man, but in that pronouncement God gave Adam and Eve the hope of redemption.

God said to Satan in Gen 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [Or seed] and hers; he will crush [Or strike] your head, and you will strike his heel."

God crushed the head of Satan at the cross. He was defeated. But until he is finally locked away in the bottomless pit forever, which will take place at the very end of time, Satan is still a foe to consider.

He does not have the power over us as he did when we were outside of Christ, but he still goes about like a roaring lion. For the believer Satan's bark is much bigger than his bite. And the reason for that is because the bite or death, has been overcome by Jesus through His resurrection.

1Co 15:55-58 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" [Hosea 13:14] 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Rom 8:37-39 "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, [Or nor heavenly rulers] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God does not want to see you fall for the false teachings in this world which Satan uses to cripple us, spiritually speaking. Living

victoriously in Christ does not preclude our responsibility to seek the truth of God's word and be the kind of "Bereans" who don't simply swallow any teaching that comes down the pike.

Let's stand firm on the Rock. Let's stand firm on the foundation Christ has given us in His word and live as children who do not need to fear the wiles of the devil, but who must respect the warfare we are engaged in as we always put on God's armor of faith; Christ's righteousness; the truth of God's word; the gospel of peace; and the salvation we possess.

Since our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of darkness, let's allow the light of God's truth to expose the false teachings we encounter and may we reject them whether other Christians accept them or not.

Like new born babes, long for the *pure milk of the word*, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.