

Paul's and Warning to the Church

Romans 16:17-20 17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. 20 And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Paul's manner of speaking now changes. From rejoicing for the unity and love he has observed among the brethren and the expressing of pleasant greetings, he now changes his whole tone of communication from greetings to warnings. Sadly this is all too often a necessity in the church. It is a necessity because throughout the history of the church there have been and always will be those who cause division and offenses in God's Israel.

As Peter also warned in his epistle, "But there **were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way **of truth will be blasphemed**. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." (2 Peter 2:1-3)

There are two questions we need to ask regarding Paul's warning here. First, What is his purpose in this warning? And secondly, How are we to respond in order to protect the flock? Then he gives the reason why this must be done. Assuring us of our final victory over Satan and his devices of destruction.

- A. Paul's purpose for this warning.
 1. It is to protect God's people from false teachers in the church.
 2. Paul here is not talking about minor issues.
 - a. Not talking about the mode of baptism.
 - b. He has already pointed out there may be differences - regarding meat and drink, but that is not his concern here.
 3. Rather Paul here refers to those who cause division and offence *contrary to the doctrine which you learned*.
 - a. The greater part of his letter was concerning the "Gospel"
 - b. That which he called the "power of God unto salvation" to everyone who believes.
 - c. He is talking about things of eternal importance.
 4. Chapters 1 - 11 dealt with the need for salvation, and the means of salvation.
 5. He spoke of the terrible state of mankind which he summed up for us in Rom 1:18 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* (see Romans 1-3)
 - a. Men have exchanged the truth for a lie.
 - b. There are none who seek after God, none who understand.
 - c. All men by nature do not fear of God.
 - d. He has spoken of the hopelessness of mankind for all are under the law, and thus all stand guilty before God.
 - e. Thus all men are under God's wrath.

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness

6. Yet in the church today men are told of God's "unconditional love".

7. God love has been provided at a great price.

- a. God set forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation **by His blood**. (Rom. 3:25)
- b. Sinful man is redeemed from the wrath of God not with silver or gold, but by the precious blood of the Lamb of God.
- c. God laid on Him

*Isa 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was **wounded for our transgressions**, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

8. The central message of the whole of Scripture is this “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”.

9. But Paul here warns that there will be those who will change the very message of God’s Word *and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple*.

- a. The very person and purpose of Christ has been changed.
- b. The most prevalent error in the church today is that Jesus Christ is put forth as one who can make us feel better about ourselves.
- c. The advertising slogan, “Things go better with coke” has been changed to say “Things go better with Christ”

10. Smooth words have replaced “repent or perish”

- a. Christ is proclaimed as a “life coach” rather than a redeemer.
- b. The house of prayer has been replaced with game arcades and a gymnasiums for body building and sports.

11. Michael Horton in his latest book “Christless Christianity” points out that “God is not being denied, but trivialized - used for our life programs rather than received, worshipped and enjoyed.”

- a. He asks, did Christ come to heal broken lives, or raise those who are “dead in trespasses and sins”.

B. What does Paul instruct us to do to protect the Church? - Note those who bring division *and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them*.

1. Mark them, point them out.
 - a. Never pleasant
 - b. If we do this we will be called the divisive ones.
2. Avoid them, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.
3. Never permit this teaching to be permitted in the church of which we are a part.
4. The reason - the hearts and the minds of the unlearned will be harmed.

Conclusion: Always remember it is not those outside the church that are dangerous, it is the wolves in sheep’s clothing that can do greater harm

It has been said that the blood of martyrs has been the seed of the church, but false teachers have been the means of destruction in the church.

Thus Paul points out false teachers will deceive the simple and the unlearned - *by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple*

But men need to hear the truth, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God

Only by this means can Christ be glorified and sinners faithfully warned.

May we by God’s grace ever be watchful.