

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #58

Romans 16:17-20

One of the great mistakes a church can make is the mistake of thinking it is to tolerate everyone. It is absolutely true that the church is to patiently endure much and it is also true that most people are received and welcomed. For example, we as a church are to welcome sinful people. We as a church are to welcome burdened people. The church is to be a place for people who have real problems and real needs. It is to be a place that welcomes people who want to learn about God and people who are hurting or suffering. However, the church is never to welcome or tolerate someone who tampers with sound Biblical doctrine.

A CHURCH MUST IDENTIFY AND TURN AWAY FROM PEOPLE WHO CONTINUALLY CAUSE PROBLEMS CONTRARY TO SOUND BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION.

Theological unity must be protected at all costs. The church can take a lot, but it cannot and must not put up with one who tampers with God's truth.

Now this basic idea comes from **verse 17**. The Greek word "keep your eye on" is one that means very carefully watch and look at someone. The Greek word "turn away" means to shun or get away from someone. **What Paul is saying is that it is the responsibility of the church to fix their eyes upon a person who teaches something contrary to sound Biblical doctrine which has been taught specifically concerning the Grace of God.**

Paul is saying here, you get away from people who do not adhere to this and he sets forth two of their character traits:

- 1) They cause dissension in God's people. **16:17a**
- 2) They hinder growth of God's people. **16:17b**

Paul says, identify these people and turn from them.

REASON #1 – Because they are not servants of Jesus Christ. **16:18a**

The word "slaves" is a Greek word that refers to a "bond slave." **The interesting grammatical point which Paul makes is that these kinds of people are not bonded to "our Lord Christ."** The implication is that these teachers claim they are serving Jesus Christ and they claim they are really teaching truth, but they are not serving "our Lord"; they are serving their own (i.e. II Cor. 11:13-15).

We may learn a very important lesson - just because someone says, "I serve God", "I am a minister", "I am in ministry", "I teach the Bible" does not mean they really are and really do. In order for one to make that claim, they must be striving for Biblical and doctrinal accuracy and precision. That is precisely what Paul is teaching.

Jesus Christ taught the same thing (Matthew 7:21-27). A key determining factor was their willingness to accept truth He taught.

REASON #2 – Because they are serving themselves . **16:18b**

These people are serving their own appetites. This indicates they are self -centered, not God-centered. They are serving their own inner drives and ambitions. These people are not really interested in understanding truth and they are not really interested in doing the will of God; they are only interested in themselves.

REASON #3 – Because they can damage the unsuspecting . **16:18c**

The third reason to spot and avoid people who do not continue to maintain sound doctrine is because they can do great harm to those who are not theologically strong or stable. They can do great damage to those who have not matured in the doctrines of the faith.

Notice false teaching affects the heart of a person. The word “unsuspecting” (ακαων) refers to those who are simple and shallow when it comes to the things of God (Smith, p. 16).

These confused and false teachers appear to have speech so benign but the consequences are malignant. It can destroy the faith and the heart of a person in the church.

REASON #4 – Because of what is good . **16:19**

In the Greek text, Paul uses an article “the” before good and evil, which indicates he is referring to something specific. **The specific thing to which he was referring was getting away from those who were not sound, who did not adhere to sound Biblical teaching and instruction.**

A key to us becoming strong is to fellowship with others who love God’s Word and who are dedicated to it.

God never intended that His church be a place of religious toleration, especially when it came to teaching. A good God-honoring church will keep its eyes on its flock and make certain that what is being taught at every level is sound and true.