

Rom 16:17-27

The last portion of Paul's letter to the church in Rome consists of final reminders and encouragements. These are like the things your parents say as you are getting in the car to leave on a long journey – important tidbits that relate to key things they have already said, and personal expressions of love to send you on your way.

Watch out for those who cause divisions – avoid them. The word for division literally means to stand apart, separately. We sometimes think of division as being based on some point of doctrine, and it often is, but it also may come from a misguided sense of status or honor. Earlier in this letter, Paul reminded the church that God placed them all together in one body, “so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (12:5) In light of that, he instructed them to “Live in harmony with one another” (12:16) and to welcome one another (14:1). We ought to recognize the obligation and privilege we have of fellowship within the body of Christ. This is a gift from God, and for any one of us to think we are too good to stand with others in the church is a reproach on God's gift.

Watch out also for those who create obstacles – *skandalon*, cause of stumbling. You probably recognize the modern word “scandal” in there, which is defined as a circumstance that offends propriety and disgraces those associated with it. There is an easy connection here to the concept of gossip. “Have you heard what so-and-so did?” Even in Paul's day, there were those people who weren't happy unless they were stirring up some sort of strife. People haven't changed. He says this kind of behavior is contrary to doctrine you were taught – which doesn't divide, trip, or create drama; it encourages, strengthens, shows care. This also tells us that we should measure everything – doctrine and behavior – against the teaching of the Word of God. The outworking of our faith should cause us to show grace, offer forgiveness, encourage to godliness, and generally reflect the character of Christ. Any teaching or lifestyle that is contrary to that, we are told to watch carefully, be on guard against.

What are we to do with these kinds of people? Avoid them. The word “avoid” is *ekklineo* – the opposite of our word “incline,” which would be leaning into, so this is leaning away from, not leaning on those people. *Pres act imp* – keep on avoiding – actively avoid them. Why? They don't serve Christ, but their own appetites. No matter how much they claim to love and serve Christ, the fruit of their life is not in keeping with Him. Their focus is on what they want, their agenda, “and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” Notice that these people may be very smooth, able to convince others that their way is biblical or right. Biblical maturity is what we need to guard against them.

Be wise as to what is good, innocent to what is evil. Paul wanted to assure them that he didn't imply they were naïve, because their obedience to Christ was well-known. To be innocent about evil is to be unmixed, simple, pure. The word was used of wine that was not diluted. As he had taught in Rom 12:2 not to be conformed to this world, now he reminds them to guard against becoming diluted by, or mixed up with the world's ways – which would include the previously mentioned divisiveness drama. Don't get caught up in the foolish arguments that detract and distract from what God says is important. That is part of Satan's agenda to defeat us, so Paul gave a quick reminder that God will crush Satan soon – in the meantime we are to stand firm, be on our guard, and be wise.

Personal greetings. A quick list of Paul's companions and co-workers who sent greetings to the church in Rome. Just a quick side-note on this list, the mention of Erastus, the city treasurer, or director of public works, is of interest because in 1929 an inscription was found in Corinth which mentioned Erastus paying

for a stretch of pavement at his own expense in return for his office of steward. We don't know if this is the same Erastus, but the connection is certainly possible, given the place, the name, and the office all match.

Paul closes his letter with a Doxology or blessing. (What do we know about God from this?) He is able to strengthen/prop up us by the gospel. The good news, not only of our salvation, but also of God's continuing work in our lives, which helps, strengthens and guides us through the tough times. He revealed the mystery long kept secret – that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, that He has paid the price for our salvation so we can be reconciled with God (basically all the doctrinal things Paul taught us throughout this book, such as – we are justified by faith; Christ's one act of righteousness leads to justification for all; we have been released from the Law through Christ, and have been made joint-heirs together with Him; His gift of salvation by faith is available to all who calls on Jesus, and in response we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God). What is the intended result? "To bring about the obedience of faith." When we believe the good news of Christ's salvation, we will obey His Word. It results in a radical change in our lifestyle – from rebellion and disobedience to submission and loving obedience. We should no longer be self-serving, but self-sacrificing for the benefit of others and the praise of God. And that is the last thought – "to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."