

Message #57**Romans 16:17-20**

Years ago, there was a church I know of that was doing everything it could to bring in the people. One of the things it did to do that was to let people do what they wanted to do or what they had an inkling to do. Their point is this is the people's church; our goal is to make them all feel good and important.

Now there is a sense where that is true. The list of people Paul gave in Romans 16 proves that many people did work in the church for the Lord and they did positively impact the church.

But the idea here was if someone came to the church and wanted to do something, they pretty much let them do it. Well one guy who came to the church wanted to teach adults. Everyone thought it was a great idea so they let him teach. Let him have a class.

Well he began to teach things that weren't right. He started teaching the people that they were heading into the Tribulation and that they would not be Raptured. He started teaching people the heresy of Lordship salvation and its attack against pure Grace.

As a result, the people started to become confused and some didn't know what to believe. That started some to question the Bible on a variety of subjects. The church became a total mess and in a short time, the church was gone. Solid people who knew truth left.

This all happened because the leadership of the church did not do its job. The leadership of the church did not follow the grace teaching of Paul that says this:

THE CHURCH MUST SPOT AND IDENTIFY THOSE WHO CONTINUALLY PROMOTE TEACHING AND CAUSES THAT ARE CONTRARY TO SOUND TEACHING AND THEY MUST TURN AWAY FROM THEM.

This is so important and interesting. One of the priorities of the church is to promote the peace of God (Rom. 15:33; 16:20). One of the ways to promote the peace of God is to not be at peace with certain people.

In the previous verses, Paul gave a list of faithful people who were faithful to God and to Paul. But those people had earned that reputation. Some of them had been solid believers longer than Paul. But Paul was not about to say everyone at church is the same.

Doctrinal unity and sound doctrine and teaching must be protected at all costs. The church is to be a place that patiently endures all kinds of people, but there is one area that it should never endure; any person who is teaching what is not sound and true and accurate.

In Romans 16:1-16, Paul has just given a list of people who are to be greeted and esteemed.

However, when we come to **verse 17**, which begins with a strong negative prohibition “now” or “but” (de), there are some people who are not to be greeted. **There are some people who are to be avoided.**

When Paul says, “**keep your eye on,**” what he means is that you carefully watch and look at certain people. You don’t greet them; you spot them and you turn away from them. You don’t have fellowship with them.

William R. Newell said, “mad dogs are shot,” “infectious diseases are quarantined” but evil teachers are everywhere tolerated and supported (*Romans, Verse-by-Verse*, p. 550).

James Montgomery Boice described this perfectly when he wrote: “Often these are the people who show up in a congregation suddenly, usually from another church where they have also caused trouble, though they give no indication of that when they come. They are knowledgeable. They usually have considerable abilities. They are leaders in the sense that they have enthusiasm and get people to follow them easily. Generally, they are used to teaching, and they want to fill this role in their new church. Unfortunately, although the Bible warns us to make full proof of those who want to be teachers, people like this are usually warmly welcomed and quickly put to work, because most churches need able people who actually want to serve” (*Romans*, Vol. 4, p. 1929).

These people come into the church and they are not interested in the pure truth of God’s word and they are not interested in rightly dividing a text. They are not interested in sound doctrine and the whole counsel of God. What they are interested in is propagating their own way of thinking. The church must be on the lookout against people like that.

Years ago, we had a guy come into our church in Indiana who would put heretical tracts in the pews and bathrooms. He was trying to get people to go back under the O.T. law. When we found out who was doing it, we met him, confronted him and put a stop to him.

Not long ago we had someone come to this church who wanted to send out something to you the congregation. We analyzed it and realized it was not solid, so we would not sanction it here. Person got mad and left.

Now Paul says in **verse 17**, “I urge you.” So this is another urgent message Paul wants to communicate before he ends the letter. Paul began the practical section of Romans with the same “urging” (Rom. 12:1). Then he again used it when he urged the people to be people of prayer (Rom. 15:30). Now he uses it in regard to spotting certain people and staying away from them.

Now Paul makes this appeal to “brethren” who are the believers in the church. He wants everyone in the church to be on the lookout for specific people.

To handle this text, we would like to ask and answer three questions:

QUESTION #1 – What are the character traits we may spot? 16:17a-b

The people may be spotted by making two character trait observations. The phrase “the teaching which you learned” goes with both character observations. So the specific teaching by which we may analyze things is the grace teaching found in the book of Romans. Paul has just unraveled the grace gospel in Romans, which he received directly from Jesus Christ, and we may gauge what is sound and right in view of the standard Paul has set forth:

Character Trait #1 - They cause dissensions concerning the true teaching you have received and learned. **16:17a**

The word “dissension” (dicostasiaς) is a word that means to stand apart from something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 118). Grammatically speaking, what this means is that this person will be propagating and teaching things that are apart from true grace instruction found in the book of Romans. This person will be in dissent against what is revealed in Romans. They will propagate a man-centered works message, rather than a God-centered Grace message.

These kinds of people try to put people back under the O.T. law or legalistic codes. They attack grace and they are able to do it in a very sneaky way. They have discussions that lead to dissensions.

Many years ago here there was someone who came to this church really on the bandwagon of Lordship Salvation. He was subtle about how he promoted it, but he promoted it. Finally, we went to him and said you are not to promote that in this church. You are welcome to come, you are not welcome to promote your doctrine and if you continue we will expose you and you may leave.

Character Trait #2 - They cause hindrances contrary to the true teaching you have received and learned. **16:17b**

The word “hindrances” (skandala) is a word that refers to teaching that causes someone to stumble and ensnares them. Their teaching may actually lead someone into sin and scandal. This is a word that actually means the person is setting a trap or bait to actually ensnare people away from true grace teaching (*Ibid.*, p. 408).

These teachers will begin to depart from what is revealed in the Scriptures and lead people away to things that can doctrinally and spiritually trap them.

QUESTION #2 – What are we to do when we spot people like this? 16:17c

Paul says, “turn away from them.” The verb “turn away” (ekklinw) is one that means to turn aside from and turn away from the person. The verb is present tense middle voice, meaning each individual is to make a decision to continually and habitually get away from that person. You do not appease him or listen to him, you get away from him.

Paul said in Galatians 1:8-9 if someone taught something other than pure grace, let him be accursed.

Paul said in I Timothy 6:3-5 that a teacher who is not teaching grace truth concerning Jesus Christ is an arrogant and ignorant person who does nothing but cause problems.

John said in II John 1:9-10 that if someone does not teach truth about Jesus Christ, do not listen to them and do not let them into your home and do not even give them a greeting.

When we were in Ephesus, one of the places I wanted to see and did see was the bathhouse. It is where people went to take baths. There is a famous story about the Apostle John that took place in that bathhouse in Ephesus. The story was told by Polycarp, who was the personal student of the Apostle John. According to Polycarp, John went into the bathhouse to take a bath and a heretical teacher whose name was Cerinthus was in that bathhouse.

Cerinthus was a heretic who attacked the Person and work of Jesus Christ. He attacked the grace of God. He promoted that people had to be circumcised and he promoted that people had to keep Sabbath day worship and rules. He was totally opposed to grace and truth. When the Apostle John saw he came into that bathhouse, he fled, warning God's people to get away from that man and that bathhouse because he was such a heretic that God may cause the walls of the bathhouse to collapse in judgment.

QUESTION #3 – Why should we spot these kinds of people and turn away from them?

There are five reasons we are to get away from them:

Reason #1 - Because these kinds of teachers are not servants of our Lord Christ. **16:18a**

Understand this point; there are many teachers in churches who are not true teachers.

These are teachers who are not true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just because one says he/she is a minister or teacher does not make it true in the sight of God. There are people who claim to be ministers, teachers, televangelists who are not true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not teach the pure truth of God and they do not study to rightly divide the Scriptures in a way that is Biblically and doctrinally accurate.

Jesus Christ was very clear to point out that one who is truly right with Him will be very serious about accurately understanding and applying God's word. There will be many who will claim they were in ministry who were not interested in that and Jesus said I will say to them "I never knew you, depart from Me" (Matthew 7:21-27).

Reason #2 - Because these kinds of teachers are servants of their own appetites. **16:18b**

There are many teachers and ministers who are doing what they do because it glorifies them.

They get some egotistic high in standing up before people. Their plan and program is about themselves.

False teachers are self-centered but they are not self-controlled. They are given to their own appetites. They are not truly interested in accurately understanding God's word. These kinds of people have their own agenda, their own ambitions and their own self goals. They are not truly interested in the true work of God. They are interested in their own agenda.

Reason #3 - Because these kinds of teachers deceive the hearts of people by their smooth and flattering speech. **16:18c**

The false teachers prey on the unsuspecting. They have a charisma to them. They do not go after the strong and stable. They are known for their flattery. They can really talk in a persuasive and positive and flowery way. This person is out to tug at a person's heart.

The word "flattery" is the word from which we get our English word "eulogy." This kind of teacher knows how to eulogize you and make you feel real special. They are deceitful liars who do not care if you are right with God.

Reason #4 - Because spotting these kinds of teachers and avoiding them is what is wise and good. **16:19**

In God's estimation, you are a wise person and you are doing good if you can spot these frauds and get away from them.

Paul says you are obedient people and your reputation has spread that you are serious people who love God's word and are obedient to it. Paul says I rejoice over you.

But Paul says I want you to do what is wise and good. There is an article before the nouns "good" and "evil." The article points to something specific in the context which is spotting and avoiding these kinds of teachers.

Notice these kinds of teachers are not just confused, they are evil.

Reason #5 - Because these kinds of teachers are Satanic. **16:20**

Don't be fooled, Satan is behind false teachers. He loves to have people creep into a church and try to take over, especially when it comes to teaching.

God's people need to stay clear of these religious frauds and realize one day God will crush them.