

ROMANS (16:17-20)

Final Warning

PART 100 – APRIL 1, 2007

TROUBLEMAKERS

Everybody comes to church with a personal agenda ... every one of us does.

Q: The only question really, is: What's *your* agenda?

Q: Is it to glorify God and grow in His wisdom and likeness?

Q: Or, is it something less honorable?

As Paul wraps up this letter, he sounds one last alarm. He wants his readers in Rome to be on the lookout. It's a final warning against people with a wicked agenda.

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. 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. 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. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. - *Romans 16:17-20 NIV*

When it comes to dealing with these troublemakers, Paul offers up two practical, simple pieces of advice:

1. "Watch out for" them
2. "Keep away from them"

So, we better know exactly who "them" is. And Paul provides us with two telltale signs to be aware of:

Watch out for those who cause divisions (16:17a)

Paul is talking about *doctrinal* divisions. The Roman congregation had an incredibly diverse mixture of religious backgrounds: from ungodly heathens, to idol-fearing pagans, to meticulously regulated Jews.

And the only way for peace and joy and harmony to exist in the church, is for a congregation to be in unity regarding Christ.

[Watch out for those who] put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (16:17b)



We are always going to be surrounded by believers who put their own spin on what's spiritual. Therefore, we must watch for those who depart from God's Word. There are plenty of people who profess to be Christian, yet persist in departing from the basic New Testament doctrine the apostles taught.

Notice Paul says: "contrary to the teaching you have learned"

We will be vulnerable to distortions of the Gospel, to the degree that we remain ignorant of the truths we profess.



Bank tellers become so familiar with handling real money, that when they get a counterfeit, they can immediately *sense* something's wrong before examining the bill to discover why. Do you handle the Gospel enough to sense a counterfeit?

The only way we'll be alerted to spiritual phonies and forgers, is by making three commitments to the Gospel. We must:



- A. Listen to it - In order to increase our understanding.
- B. Learn it - That means reading, thinking, & memorizing.
- C. Live it - It is essential to practice what we preach.

This is our *only* defense against Christian counterfeiters. And when you spot one of 'em, Paul says:

Keep away from them

This is for self-preservation. If we hang around someone who professes to be a Christian, yet justifies a lifestyle of ongoing, unrepentant sin, it'll only be a matter of time before it begins to take a toll on us.



Avoiding someone doesn't mean we stop caring for them, or praying for them, or even talking to them. It means two things: insulating ourselves from their influence; and letting them know what is coming between us.

Honest, gracious, gentle, loving confrontation like this, will accomplish far more than arguing about what the Bible says.

For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites (16:18a)

A SINISTER SPIRIT

See, the issue here isn't a simple intellectual mistake. This isn't about two believers exchanging views on theology. This is about idolatry, self-worship, and worldly passions. This is a sinister, self-seeking spirit.

By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (16:18b)

False teachers and counterfeit Christians won't pull us away from our faith by being rude and harsh. They do so by sounding enlightened, sophisticated, and progressive.



- "Smooth talk" means their words are pleasant and persuasive.
- "Flattery" is a word that simply means: blessing.

They're charming. They're witty. They're sweet. Heresy traps by its power to seduce.

And we provide a "doorway" Paul didn't dream of: television!

There's one televangelist that advocates a morality that's subjective and allows for sex outside of marriage; and teaches that faith in self is more important than faith in Christ.

This TV evangelist professes to be a Christian, but denies the need for salvation through Jesus' shed blood, proclaims that all roads lead to God, and says homosexuality is a God-given gift.

And I'm guessing that a lot of you watch this preacher, and you most-likely admire this preacher.

Q: Want me to tell you who it is? Now, don't get mad at me if you're a supporter, okay? Promise?



Boo! I'm not just picking on Oprah; only using her as an example. She does a lot of good! No question. But her brand of Christianity is a counterfeit.

- It's a cocktail of Christianity, New Age, and mysticism.

Heresy seduces with subtlety ... even obedient believers.

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 (16:19)

The whole reason Paul is sending this letter, is so that his faithful brothers and sisters can grow in wisdom about Christ.

And he's saying: don't even dabble with compromising truth.

And then Paul closes by reminding us that the father of all counterfeiters is going to get exactly what's coming to him.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet (16:20a)

In the entire book of Romans, this is the only mention of Satan. After sixteen chapters, he gets this one mention: He's doomed.

Q: Did you notice that God will crush him: "under your feet"?

Paul is speaking to his Roman friends, and he's using imagery common to them - that of an ancient victor placing his foot on the neck of his conquered foe to demonstrate his victory.

All lies - no matter how popular - are eventually crushed under the weight of truth. And those who stand on truth will stand firm in the end ... because it's God who makes us stand.

And Paul says this will happen: "soon"

Some people are troubled by this because it's been 2000 years!

I think they miss Paul's point. As soon as his Roman friends receive this letter they'll be able to start growing in wisdom and unity concerning the Gospel.

And they'll be able to arm themselves with a nuclear weapon against these tissue-paper imposters. A weapon so powerful, it pounds at the heart of the Gospel; it displayed itself through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; and Paul repeats it again and again throughout Romans.

Grace. The unmerited, unearned extravagant love of a living God!

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you (16:20b)

This is Paul's final warning:

- Don't trade your grace for anything.