

**The Kind to Watch Out For—Romans 16:17-18—5/19/2013**

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What is your reaction when you hear something not exactly right?

When you hear something wrong, is your impulse to correct it right away or to smooth it over without any relational ripples?

And what's your response when someone speaks up to correct or tries to smooth it over quietly?

Whatever your reaction to the initial provocation, you are probably inclined to react again to others' reactions too.

Many of us tend toward either wanting to protect relationships or wanting to protect the clear truth.

But today I want us to see that those are not opposites.

We should not think of guarding truth and guarding unity as either-or options as if you can only do one or the other.

That's a false dichotomy that can lead to wrong responses that hinder understanding and harm people.

But if you've been around long enough, you've probably had conversations with people on one or the other extreme.

One extreme is the person who says he's devoted to the truth but beats people down with that truth and seems focused on being right only for his own glory.

On the other extreme is the person who just wants peace and sacrifices truth in order to fake a veneer of unity where people act like they are together but they really are not.

Neither of those extremes accomplishes biblical goals.

Even in questionable matters of conscience like we discussed in Romans 14, we must be open and honest and willing to discuss issues of truth and learn and weigh out what is biblically clear.

And even in unquestionable matters of essential doctrine our goal is to unify in relationships that apply those doctrines.

So truth and unity should go together and grow together.

We shouldn't have to sacrifice one to get the other.

Instead, the path to unity described in Ephesians 4 is the path of growing in the truth to a mature understanding of doctrine.

After describing the unity of those in Christ and calling for its protection to begin Ephesians 4, listen to Paul's instructions for how to build that unity in the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16 says God “gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

That describes the path to mature unity as the path of truth.

It's a path of building up in faith and knowledge so Christians are not tossed about or tricked by wrong doctrine but guarded with truth.

So contrary to what some might say, doctrine is not a dirty word that is always divisive.

Doctrine is just another word for teaching.

And when doctrine is understood rightly, it should lead us to humility under God and humility toward each other.

And humility paves the path of true peace.

So the path to preserving right relationships and fostering unity includes and depends on teaching truth & deepening doctrine.

You need to understand that truth-driven path to growing unity because you will face attacks on truth and attacks on unity.

Whether you want to think about it or not, if you are a Christian living in this fallen world even in a faithful church, you will face attacks on truth and attacks on unity.

And if you read the NT, you find that warnings about attacks on truth and unity are most often warnings about what rises up in the church.

It is sad, but problems often come from those inside the church.

We can easily think of how bad the lost people out there in the world are and how we need to guard against them and that's true.

But we also need to be aware of false teachers rising up within the church and attacking truth and unity.

For example, when Paul left the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he warned them that "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

So he urged them to be on guard for themselves and the flock.

Jesus also warned of false prophets to come, even some who would do signs and wonders to lead people away. [Matthew 7:15-16; 24:24]

And in Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, we find warnings for those church leaders to watch themselves and their doctrine and to guard the truth from error and attacks.

Similarly, Jude and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter describe false teachers lurking in the loving fellowship of the church ready to cause shipwreck.

So we shouldn't view error in the church as a remote possibility that we'll never face and we shouldn't treat the threat of false teachers casually.

Leaders & all Christians need to know what to watch out for.

All false teachers are not alike, but some things generally characterize them that we should be aware of.

In Romans 16:17-18, Paul offers descriptions of the kind to watch out for in guarding the truth and guarding unity in the church.

So as we get back into the final chapter of our study through Paul's letter to the Romans, we have a warning about false teachers and some key ways to identify them.

In Romans 16:17-18, we're going to outline 3 descriptions of false teachers that warn you what to watch out for when you inevitably face challenges to truth and unity in the body of Christ.

Look at Romans 16 & let's read verses 16-20. [READ]

We've already studied through the greetings in verses 1-16 of this chapter and learned about the various people Paul knew in Rome.

And throughout those greetings, we found an emphasis on love and appreciation and affection in those relationships.

It's in the midst of those treasured relationships and loving partnerships in the Gospel that verse 17 breaks in with a warning.

Some have said that this warning is out of place, but if you have family and friends among whom you share precious closeness, you know that's something worth protecting.

So it's not at all out of place for Paul to warn against those who would upset the loving partnerships of Gospel ministry he has listed.

Many of us know from experience how hurtful and harmful it can be when truth and unity are attacked within a body.

And that makes us aware of the link from the greetings of verses 1-16 to the warning in verse 17 against those who could sow destruction.

It's vital to get these descriptions of verses 17-18 lest you get tricked and led astray or wrapped up in a wrongful rebellion.

Note what Paul warns about 1<sup>st</sup> because this is where the attack starts.

Point #1—false teachers cause trouble against truth.

To be prepared against attacks, realize, #1, that false teachers cause trouble against truth.

Rarely do false teachers want you to open your Bibles and study exactly what a verse says within its context and within the overall scope of Scripture.

Talking to false teachers is often like trying to pin Jell-o to a wall because they keep shifting their position or changing their ideas or turning the conversation to some other topic or focus.

They don't want to state and stick to clear biblical truth.

So they cause trouble against truth rather than helping people to understand and believe truth.

Read verse 17 to see where I get that. [READ]

That first word, 'now', is a transitional word that can be translated 'and' or 'but' as a link from the greetings before to the warning here.

And this is serious urging or exhorting or encouraging as Paul was coming alongside them to help them.

His concern was for his spiritual brothers & sisters in God's family.

Paul genuinely cared and if you care about people, then you will warn them about potential dangers.

The world's permissive immorality and anti-authority bias sell the idea that if you love people, you leave them alone to have what they want.

But that's a lie—if you truly love someone, then you oppose anything that harms them.

For example, to love children is to hate abuse and abortion and abandonment because all those things harm children.

Love does forgive and persevere, but 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 is also clear that love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

Just as loving parents correct & protect their kids, so loving Christians should do so for one another.

Love involves protection that warns against dangers and that's the love Paul was exercising here with his spiritual brethren.

The exhortation is to watch—to keep your eye on, to observe, to look at and contemplate and not lose sight of a certain kind of people.

Sometimes that verb—skopeo—is used of watching good examples so that you can follow them carefully.

But here the watching is followed up with an imperative command near the end of verse 17—to avoid them, to keep away from them.

So watching out for the kind described here is for the purpose of steering clear of them and staying away from them.

The picture is that these trouble-makers can sneak in and sneak around and sneak up on you and you need to be always watchful against their wiles and ready to get away and keep away.

My kids like to play ‘Capture the Flag’ and other games around our house and typically at our house you don’t have different jerseys to show who is on which team.

So you need to remember which kids are on which team and not get fooled or forget when one of your younger siblings tries to slide by unnoticed while you chase one of the bigger kids, right?

Well—verses 17-18 here teach us what to watch for in false teachers so we can know those who are not on our team.

They are not on God’s team and we need to keep checking for anyone who fits these descriptions and even checking ourselves.

And what kind should we watch out for and avoid?

We said #1, to watch for false teachers that cause trouble against truth.

Verse 17 calls them trouble-makers, almost literally—they are those who make dissensions and hindrances, or as the ESV puts it, make divisions and obstacles.

They cause groups to be split apart for wrong reasons and they put stuff in the way of people coming to the truth together.

Dissensions are listed among the bad fruit of the flesh in Galatians 5:20 along with factions and disputes or rivalries.

It’s a picture of separating into warring parties, maybe by stirring up suspicions and speculations by gossip and slander.

Watch out for those who create such dissensions.

And watch out also when they make stumbling blocks that get in the way of the truth and lead people to trip or fall.

But be careful here—the truth is not the problem—teaching right doctrine is not the problem to be watched out for.

Paul did not say not to teach truth that can be hard to grasp, for example, or never to say anything controversial.

That’s impossible for Christians because preaching Christ crucified can be a stumbling block to unbelieving Jews according to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:23 & other verses.

And Jesus warned that following Him could cause division & that the world would persecute His followers like it persecuted Him. [Mathew 10:34-36; John 15:20]

So the caution here is not against teaching doctrine even when it can be deep or difficult or unpopular.

And the problem is certainly not that there is one source of absolute truth in the Bible and there is only one way of salvation in contrast to all other religions and worldviews.

The pluralism of our times tries again and again to quiet Christians from proclaiming the Bible as God’s only book and Jesus as the only way of salvation.

But proclaiming those truths is the best and only way to love people.

Only when absolute truth is proclaimed can God’s higher authority prevail and people not be left to pander to every special interest or cave to whoever is in power.

The news in our nation continues to pour out stories of abuse of power by leaders and dishonest cover-ups, the latest being the IRS.

But when God & absolute truth are unwelcome, it's no wonder that has become the norm in our times.

So our response should never be to clam up and be silent on sin or to be wishy-washy about the biblical claims of Christ as the only Savior and the Scripture as the ultimate authority.

Those vital truths may create divisions and obstacles for some, but they are not what Paul cautions against here.

The caution here is against those who cause dissensions and obstacles contrary to such truths—contrary to the teaching you have learned.

In other words, the caution is against those who cause trouble against the clear teaching of Scripture.

As the Bible is faithfully taught and people are disciplined and trained in the truth, the caution is about those who go against that truth.

The issue is not concern over what people like to hear or agree with, but over what the church was taught by the Apostles.

And the issue is also not over petty preferences that are not in the Bible that immature or unstable believers get hung up on.

Please don't insert your pet hobby-horse into this passage and assume it means you need to divide over styles or stereotypes.

This is not a green light to blast people in blogs or vent on facebook or argue over styles or some other silly soapbox.

Titus 3:9 & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:23 & other passages would urge us to avoid such strife about non-essentials and speculations.

A lot of heat is wasted in discussions and relationships on issues that lack a lot of biblical light.

That's not the concern Paul is focusing on here.

The issue is concern over what the Bible teaches.

And the trouble-makers are those who get in the way of that by creating their factions that oppose the truth that's taught.

Please see that—false teachers oppose the truth and create havoc in how they confuse and divide people.

They make it all about 'he-said, she-said', rather than about what the Bible said.

So when someone tries to shush you up from opening the Bible and tells you to stop all that doctrine stuff because it doesn't help us to love each other or doesn't help reach this generation, then watch out!

Watch out for those who make dissensions and obstacles against the truth you have learned.

And by the way, note also here that error divides rather than unifies.

So we need to be ready to let truth unify us such that we try to get other believers to sit down with our Bibles in hand ready to examine what the Scriptures say.

Being faithful to truth does not mean we immediately separate from anyone a shade different & avoid them & assume the worst of them.

It's not a mark of spirituality how many people you have cut off from fellowship and avoided because of their errors.

Where a desire to study the Scripture exists, we can do so with others.

Then truth and unity can grow together.

But we do avoid those who oppose essential biblical truths.

Those we avoid are the kind who war against the truth with dissensions and stumbling blocks.

Those who oppose biblical teaching are to be avoided—cut off and kept away from as dangerous company.

Verse 17 says separate, don't debate such false teachers—don't assume you won't be tripped up by their error.

That doesn't mean you never evangelize false teachers, but you don't let them into the fellowship and don't give their errors a hearing among other believers that can be tricked by them.

It's not unloving to warn someone of their error and separate.

To guard against wrong divisions, sometimes we need to divide from those who create divisions against the truth.

Again this is not the different convictions of Romans 14 where each one is convinced in his own mind on non-essentials that may come from strength or weakness in faith.

This is not avoiding those with different finer details of application in the practice of the Christian life.

Romans 14 taught us how to love one another and allow Christian liberty and learn and grow together.

But here in verse 17, the exhortation is to watch out for and avoid false teachers who cause trouble against clear truth, against right doctrine.

Watch out for that kind and keep away from them.

That's the warning we learn from Romans 16:17.

1<sup>st</sup>, false teachers cause trouble against truth.

Now, 2<sup>nd</sup>ly, false teachers serve self not the Savior.

Warning #2 about the kind to watch out for—false teachers serve self not the Savior.

Here we get to what they are after, what their pursuits prove they want.

Read the first half of Romans 16:18 to see this. [READ]

This kind to watch out for and avoid are of such quality that they serve as slaves of their own stomachs, meaning their own appetites, their own drives and needs and innermost longings.

They are not the kind that serve as slaves of our Lord Christ.

To be a slave of Christ is to be a Christian—that's how Paul introduced himself to begin this letter.

Christ is the Lord we share—He is our Lord—and that means He owns us and we do whatever He says.

His Word in the Scriptures is our rule of faith and practice.

But false teachers do not have that high regard for Scripture.

They may claim to believe in Christ, but they do not bow the knee to Him as Lord who rules their lives.

They live not with glad faith eager to obey Jesus' Word, but with fixation on what will feed their selfishness.

That's why it's so important to watch how we live—not only for our own souls, but also to observe how others live out what they say.

Our practice backs up our profession—or it denies it.

The kinds of dissenters to watch out for are those whose agendas are driven by their own position or praise or their own wallets or benefits.

That's why the televangelist scandals uncover lavish, luxurious lifestyles by prosperity preachers who are preying off the poor.

If you chase the money, you find posh, extravagant houses and cars and vacations and expense accounts and you don't find generous giving and sacrificial living and careful stewardship.

Philippians 3:18-19 use similar descriptions of those to avoid.

Philippians 3:18-19 says, "*they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

That's why it's interesting in our culture how personal finances are such a carefully guarded area of privacy.

I wonder if the real concern is that we would be ashamed if everyone knew how much we gave and how much we spent on ourselves.

I mean, if false teachers are slaves not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites, then what does it look like for us to be slaves of our Lord Christ & not of our appetites?

Again this gives us something to watch out for in ourselves first.

We should ask if we are slaves of Christ or our own appetites?

And then after we've examined ourselves, we'll be more alert and able to see the dangers that can lurk in and rise up in the church.

So we learn 2<sup>nd</sup>ly that false teachers serve self not the Savior.

#1—false teachers cause trouble against truth.

And #2—false teachers serve self not the Savior.

Then lastly, #3—false teachers seem endearing but are deceiving.

False teachers, #3, seem endearing but are deceiving.

Read the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse 18 to see this last point. [READ]

Watch out for those who always flatter and want you to feel all positive to get your best life now.

They may seem endearing like they are all for you and want you to be happy and spew out blessing and praise to make you feel good.

That word translated flattery is actually the word for blessing.

So realize that people can speak blessing to you or over you or about you and be doing it in wrong ways for wrong reasons.

That word coupled with this word for smooth talk should warn us against being swept away with sweet talk and manipulated by man-centered ideas that just appeal to pride or insecurities.

False teachers may speak well and be slick and polished and convincing and they may use language that sounds Christian.

They may sound like they really care about the lost or about hurting people or about other needs.

But their words are a trap to catch you & bait to deceive you & lure you in & ensnare you & seduce you.

Their words are crafted only to get what they want out of you.

And as Paul said in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:14, it's no wonder we find such trickery because "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

So we can expect false teachers to appear winsomely persuasive and captivating.

And their smooth-talk and flattery and feel-good messages are especially dangerous for the untrained and inexperienced.

Those are the unsuspecting or naïve or simple.

Those who like children tend to trust everyone and don't fear evil from people in general because maybe they've never grasped human sin.

When people are too open-minded so that everything flows in without a filter to correct it or reject it, then they are especially susceptible to smooth talking false teachers.

So if you are mature in the faith & see this, you need to protect others.

You need to have the love to graciously warn others and not selfishly check out or be lazy and not care.

It's no fun to call false teachers by name or to tell someone that author they are reading teaches errors, but it is necessary.

And the weakness of the church in our country should tell us that we need more protection against such smooth talkers who are making big bucks on all their products.

We need to be kind and compassionate and gracious in how we warn, but we need to be awakened to the biblical value of a love that warns.

We don't need to relate to everyone like a walking alarm sound buzzing every unclear detail, but if we truly love people, then we can't be scared to raise questions.

And love is the real issue—if you just arrogantly love to be right and want to set everyone else straight to be like you, you can stay quiet.

But if you love people, then you must love them enough to love the truth and speak the truth in love to them.

And listen—if you are new in the faith or are young or untaught, please realize that you need to be ready to listen and eager to learn.

Don't react when someone raises a question about something taught by your favorite teacher or tradition.

It's never going to be popular to stand up for truth and it's usually not comfortable or easy for someone to speak up and raise a question.

So prepare yourself against this pluralistic age that opposes the truth and be ready to welcome warnings that point you to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible.

Every one of us needs to be diligent to be sure we are anchored in the truth of the Bible so we're not tossed about by error and trickery.

You need to watch out for the new fads that come along that stray from the Scriptures as if they've found something better.

Read 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy & Titus, for example, to see the continued emphasis on guarding the standard of sound teaching and on the church being the pillar and ground of truth.

There is a good deposit of biblical truth entrusted to us in the Bible and we want to be faithful to understand it, protect it and pass it on for generations without messing it up.

So you need to know that error and false teachers and predators can arise even in the church to trick you and use you and abuse you and leave you behind wondering what happened.

And young people—listen—you need to know that there are very bad people out in the world and they show up in chat rooms on your computer and act like you good friends.

They show up in stores & on TV shows & on the Internet & in bad churches & even in good churches & try to get you to follow them.



They may try to get you alone or may try to get you to believe something against what your parents teach or against what you know you've been taught from the Bible.

And you need to be ready to say no and run away and not get tricked or trapped by that kind of bad person.

False teachers can seem endearing—that means they can seem really nice and give you nice stuff.

It means they can make you feel great and wonderful and yet they really are lying and tricking you to get what they want.

So kids and adults, when you flip channels and shop bookstores and listen to the radio or surf the internet, you need to be aware that this kind of false teacher is out there.

Many of them are out there & they are preying upon the unsuspecting.

They sound good and seem harmless, but that is not the truth.

They are dangerous and their smooth and flattering speech is just a mask and disguise to make them attractive to you.

So watch out for that kind.

False teachers seem endearing but are deceiving.

False teachers (1) cause trouble against truth, (2) serve self not the Savior, and (3) seem endearing but are deceiving.

There's only one perfect teacher and His name is Jesus and He has lived perfectly, died sacrificially and risen victoriously and He's the only One we should give ultimate trust and obedience.

And He's given His one inerrant authority in the sufficient Scriptures and He's promised His Spirit will teach us as we seek to know and follow Him from those Scriptures.

So as we think today about false teachers, let's be thankful for Jesus and His Word in the Bible.

And if you don't know who Jesus is or you've never turned from your self and sin to follow Him, do so today.

He is worthy of your trust & we'd love to share more about Him with you after the service if you'll allow us that privilege.

Now let's close in prayer and thank Jesus for His revelation and His Gospel promises and protection.

And let's pray He'll be faithful to keep us from error and grow us in truth and unity as His children.

Pray with me.