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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: An Impending Danger

Transcribed Message
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Romans 16:17-19

If you were to take your New Testament and to begin reading at Romans and go all the way through the epistles that are letters to the churches which would take you all the way to Jude, and I suppose in some respects go ahead and go on into Revelation 2 and 3 because it's Jesus's letters to the church. But if you just took from Romans to Jude, which are generally thought of as the letters to the churches, and you had this exercise in mind as you read. You have your paper and your pen, and you are going to create categories of doctrine and teaching as you came to them and just make notations of the passages where these things came up all the way from A to Z. Maybe as you started off in category A it would be something like adoption, atonement, that kind of thing. When you got to Z I am not sure what that would look like. But when you came to F you would almost certainly have a category called false teaching and false teachers. One of the things that might surprise you when you got to the end of this exercise is to realize how much of these letters to the churches are warnings and reminders that we're living amidst and among those who are false teachers and bringing forward false teaching. It's a large part of the letters that Paul and Peter and James and John write to the churches of the New Testament. When you came to the T category, you'd have a category that you might call troublemakers, because there are letters and notes within these letters about troublemakers and the reality is these two groups go together. We're going to see that false teachers and false teaching and troublemakers are basically one and the same.

Paul speaks to us about that this morning. We look at Romans 16 verses 17 to 19. Lord willing, in a couple weeks we'll look at verses 20 to 23 on May 12th and then on May 19th we will finish up the book of Romans with verses 25 to 27. Then the week following, we'll just go back to Romans 1:1 and start again. Here is what we're going to see this morning though. There are times when in order to maintain unity and peace in

the body of Christ you actually have to divide. That is an interesting word that Paul brings to us.

Let's look first at the more things change, just trying to set the table for what we're looking at this morning. The more things change. Trouble in the church in the 1st century. If, as I said, you just did that exercise you would realize that in the 1st century church, there were troubles. The church in Antioch. You're about 15 or so years away from the resurrection and the church in Antioch is embroiled in a decisive discussion about salvation and its relationship to the Old Covenant teaching and truth. They hammered that out and brought together (Acts 15) the Jerusalem Council to decide and to determine salvation. Yes, it is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul's writings to the churches in Galatia. The only letter that Paul wrote in which he offers not one word of commendation. He didn't say anything at the beginning or anything at the end to speak a word of commendation to the churches of Galatia. Do you know why? Because they were messing with the gospel. Paul says I can't believe that you have so easily, so quickly departed from the gospel for another gospel ... by the way, there isn't another gospel. There's only one. Then you go along a little bit further and of course the church in Corinth had all kinds of stuff going on that was tearing that church apart. Paul wrote, as we know, a couple of letters to that church. The church at Philippi. The church at Philippi, the 4th chapter. There are two ladies that Paul mentions by name: Euodia and Syntyche. Recorded forever in the eternal word of God as being two ladies in the church at Philippi that Paul had to say help them get along with each other. Now we want to be gracious and kind when are in heaven and we run into Euodia and Syntyche. We say that name rings a bell. I just can't place it. And they're going to say Philippians 4 and then move on. That was happening. There was division. There was a problem taking place. Then the church in Asia. When John writes 3 John, he writes to the church in Asia and said you guys need to keep an eye out for Diotrephes. He's a guy who was just kind of in it for himself and he's abusing the power and the leadership that God has entrusted to him as a leader.

Then you just fast-forward. This was the 1st century. That was within just decades of the life and ministry of Jesus. Then you come to the 21st century and there is trouble in the 21st century. I almost wish I had redone this list a little bit, but this is what I put

down earlier in the week. The authority of Scripture. This is a big deal today. one of the largest denominations of the world is meeting this series of days and weeks in Charlotte, North Carolina to decide again that they are leaving the authority of Scripture behind. That's in large part what Paul talks about when he talks about false teaching and false teachers. It's really leaving behind the authority of the word of God and replacing it with the words of men.

Then of course we know flowing out of that issue of the authority of Scripture are all these issues related to human sexuality. The very reason we're struggling as a church, not a culture, the very reason we're struggling as a church to deal with these matters of human sexuality is because in large measure we have left behind the authority of Scripture. Scripture speaks to these things with great clarity. We just don't like what it says. Even in the church we have trouble with this. Consumerism and assimilation. We want so desperately for some reason the approbation of the world, the acceptance of the world. We want to be like the world so badly that even in the church we're willing to compromise just to look like the world. We adopt the world's methodology and oftentimes even at points its message. That certainly is a troublesome point today. the role of government. What does that look like today? What does that look like going forward? Social issues and tribalism. We're a divided people on so many levels, on so many fronts. Even within the church, there's much division in this day and age. How do we navigate these issues and so many others like them? How do we stay on mission as a church? How do we keep the gospel central and the authority of the word of God at the forefront? Well, I say to you the more things change, it's true, the more they stay the same. But the more things change, the more we need to be anchored to the truth.

Before we jump into the outline and look at these verses, I want to make just an introductory comment about verses 17, 18, 19 and 20, even though we'll hold that one for next week. As you have been with us for these weeks, you know that in Romans 16 when you come to verse 17, it's almost like you've been interrupted. You're reading along and many Bible teachers who probably don't hold as high a view of Scripture as we would want them to, think that these verses were just interjected later by somebody else. They're so different than what was going on in the first 16 verses. In Romans 16:1-

16 it's like Paul is flipping through the directory at the church at Rome and he's commending all the people. He's calling them out by name and he's thanking them and lifting them up. Then suddenly verse 17 is like a hammer drops and Paul goes back into apostolic mode and into a set of verses that seem to not fit. Sometimes people say this was added later. I don't think that's the case at all. We're going to see that this again is just Paul's heart for what's going on at the church at Rome. But in our inclusive society, in our tolerant society, in our relativistic society, in our pluralistic society, these are like alien words. We're going to look at words this morning and it's going to be like who talks that way. Not too many people but the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does.

Let's look at what he says together. A reason to stay alert. Verse 17. Look at verse 17 with me. "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them." I want you to see four things in this verse and the very first thing I want you to see is it sounds a lot like Romans 12. If you've been with us, you know just in those opening words, I appeal to you brothers, takes us right back to Romans 12. I appeal to you, Paul said in that Romans 12 passage, to not present your bodies to the world but present them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be conformed to the world. It was an appeal that he made.

If you turn back just a page look at chapter 15 and verse 30. The same thing. "I appeal to you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf." This appeal that Paul begins with here is a heartfelt appeal. The word could be translated I urge you. I appeal to you. I beg you wouldn't miss it by much. This is how strongly and passionately he's feeling this. I implore you. I'm pleading with you. It just tells us right at the front end of these verses that you can in fact love people and be committed to truth. That is what this set of verses really brings together. It brings to us the heart of Paul and his love for these believers at Rome. I appeal to you. I implore you. I beg you. I plead with you. This is heartfelt stuff, and yet he's going to bring them right back to the truth. They are wedded together. The world would have us think that they can't coexist, but they can obviously as Paul shows us here.

What does he say? Watch out for. Watch out for. Listen to this Greek word. *Skopeo*. *Skopeo* is the word “watch”. There's an English word that is hidden in there at the front. It's our word “scope”. *Skopeo*. We've got the word “telescope” that comes out of this word. We have the word “microscope” that comes out of this word. Paul would probably say you use them both. Use the telescope to spot these people and use the microscope to get an up-close look at them. That's what he wants us to do.

Most Bible teachers think that this is more of a warning than it is a reality of the church in Rome. There hasn't been anything to this point, and we've gone through 16 chapters in Romans, that indicates that the church at Rome is dealing with false teaching and false teachers. No indication of it up until now. It might very well be that this is a warning about what can come. Likely that's what Paul's doing here. Paul knows the drill. He knows how this works. Everywhere he would go he would plant a church and then the false teachers would come in behind him. They would bring in a mixed message. They would try to bring in the law and grace. They just followed Paul around and tried to get in behind him and corrupt his message. It's likely that it hasn't happened yet in Rome, which is a good word to us as well, but it is a warning that it can happen. If you don't have your *skopeo*, your scope out, your telescope and your microscope, you're not alert and attentive to what can happen.

Now the local church, I would say to you secondly, there are dangers within and there are dangers without. There are dangers within and there are dangers without. When I read Paul's words, I immediately think of Acts 20 when he gave that tearful goodbye to the church in Ephesus. I want to read these verses because they're so appropriate to what we're looking at. Paul gathers with the elders at Ephesus and this is what he says in verse 28: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God...” one of the primary responsibilities for the elders at Covenant is to guard the flock, to make sure there isn't false teaching that is creeping in to the life of our church. “...which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure...” – listen to what he says – “...fierce wolves ...” – not just wolves but fierce wolves – “...will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore,” he says, “be alert.” Be

watching. Be aware of what's going on. That was Paul's word to the church at Ephesus and the elders. The last time he was with them he said be mindful. There are attacks that are going to come against your church from within and from without.

It would be my observation secondly that the greatest threat to the church historically has been from within. The greatest threat to the church is from within. We tend to naturally focus on the things that threaten the church from without – those things like our culture. We can become obsessed with our culture and its threat to the church. Is the culture a threat to the church? Of course it is. If we assimilate, if we yield to it, if we invite it in it's very much a threat. Think of persecution. Persecution is most often from without. But it is in times of persecution historically that the church has grown the most. It's not a threat from without in that case. We think of government, and we can obsess with government and the government's threat to the church. Listen. If you study church history, the church has had its most challenging times not from threats from without but from threats from within. That's a good word for all of us. Paul is saying to us here be mindful that the testimony of the church is often brought into disrepute from within. Think of how many churches, some of you may sadly have been a part of situations where something from within the church, some divisive division, some disagreement just ruined the reputation of the church before the watching world. That's what he is saying to us here. Be mindful. Be aware that there are those kinds of things that are there that cause us to lose our testimony. Be mindful of that.

Just as a side note, this past week the elders approved the moving forward with a plan to expand our children's ministries space. We're not announcing that this morning in terms of detail. That will come later. But we did approve that prospect going forward. We are basically out of room to grow with our children's ministry and this plan that we are working towards will not only meet the children's ministry, it will impact student ministry and adult ministries as well. Here is why I'm sharing this, in part because when we met with a man a number of months back who has walked with churches through building programs and expansion many, many, many times, the thing that stuck in my mind that he said is I have to tell you that this is often not only a time of excitement and joy in the life of the church, but it's a time often of testing. He said I have seen many churches that have gone through and into a building program only to become divided in

the midst of it and lose focus on their vision and their mission. That seems to me what Paul is saying here. There are dangers within and there are dangers without. We have to be watching. We have to be mindful. We have to be vigilant at all times.

Now look what he says. Unity is essential but not at the cost of truth. Unity is essential but it is not at the cost of truth. The great virtue of our day and time is tolerance. The only people that are not tolerated are ... well, we know who isn't tolerated. There's a very small group of people that the preachers of tolerance do not tolerate. Paul says there are times when truth trumps unity. There are just times when certain words have to be used. Truth trumps unity. I would personally like another word, but I don't have a better one. Truth trumps unity. Verse 17. "I appeal to you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them." What does he say? Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles.

Look at those two words. The only other time the word "divisions" is used in the New Testament is in Galatians chapter 5. Listen to this description in Galatians 5 beginning in verse 19. This is what Paul says: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." It is not a very pretty list. The word "divisions" tucked right in there.

Who causes divisions? Who is the source of divisions? We know who the source of divisions is. The one who has come to kill steal and destroy. It is Satan himself who is the great divider. He is the destroyer, the one who's behind it. That's who Paul is calling out here. There are those that you have to be watchful of and mindful of because they're going to create divisions within the body. He wants us to be alerted to that fact.

Ephesians 4. Paul says that it is the unity that Jesus has created that we can maintain. He challenges us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ. Jesus has given us unity. We can't add to it. We can't create it. All we can do is maintain it. All we can do is protect it. All we can do is guard it. That's what we are called to do. It is not just a matter of disagreeing. It is a matter of being disagreeable. That is what he is calling out to us. You are to watch out, he says for people like that.

Back in the day in the post office there were pictures of people who were wanted. I wonder what it would be like if we had a hall at church and we put up pictures of people who cause division in the church. How would that work? That would be a bad wall to be on. But that's what Paul says. It's not me. Paul says watch out for those people. Watch out for those people who would come in and cause division. Be mindful of them.

The second word is the word "obstacles". Hindrances is the idea here. Listen to this word. The word *skandelon*. We know that word. Scandal. Be mindful of those who would come in and cause you to stumble, to put up hindrances before you and cause a scandal. Satan's target is not churches who have already yielded and given up on the authority of Scripture. Do you think Satan is spending any time with churches who have abandoned the gospel, who don't preach and teach the word of God, who don't view it as God's word? Of course not. They're right where he wants them to be. He doesn't have to spend any time at all in pursuit of creating divisions and putting up obstacles. It's churches like ours where we say we're committed to the authority of the word of God, when we want to live our life by the word of God and the principles of the word of God. We're the target. We're the ones upon whom he wants to bring division and bring obstacles and points of hindrance. Unity is a sign of spiritual health. I am so grateful for the spiritual unity that we enjoy at Covenant. It's a sign of spiritual healthiness. It's when the church is divided that it is a sign of spiritual sickness. Again, if you've been a part of a circumstance like that you know how unattractive that is, how unexciting it is to be a part of the group that is not healthy spiritually because they're divided against one another. So here is Paul's word to us. Unity is essential but it's not so essential that we yield and give up truth.

Now notice this last point that Paul makes about this unity in truth. He ties it back to apostolic doctrine. He ties it back to apostolic doctrine. The standard and the authority. "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them." The word "contrary" is the idea of side-by-side. It is very easy to visualize this. You have truth in this column, and you have that which is false in this column. It's immediately and readily apparent which one is which. The standard of authority that Paul calls us to is

apostolic teaching. I want to take you to 2 Timothy and in 2 Timothy chapter 1 listen to what he says in verse 13: "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." There are sound words. Here he's back in Romans. He's commending to us not to do anything contrary to the apostles teaching, the apostolic teaching. The idea is this matter of orthodoxy.

We've heard the word orthodoxy. What is orthodoxy? Ortho is straight. It is correct. No parent likes to hear the word orthodontist but sometimes an orthodontist is needed to straighten the teeth. Ortho is straight, correct. It gives us the way to go if you will. Doxy is knowledge. It is wisdom and truth. We have this wedding together. The essentials of our faith is what he talking about. He is talking about the essentials of our faith – the authority of the word of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the fact that Jesus has given his life for us on the cross, the sinfulness of humanity, the return of Christ. The things that we hold to that we understand, our orthodoxy, apostolic teaching, that which God has given to us – that we are justified by faith, that we're called to holy living – that's what Paul is calling us to. Doctrine and unity then go together. It is a false concept to say doctrine is divisive, let's not deal with doctrine. If you don't have doctrine, you don't have truth. If you have doctrine, you have orthodoxy. He calls us to put that idea aside. There is no true unity if there is no truth.

Now look at the fourth thing. Disunity to maintain unity. Disunity to maintain unity. Two things again that he tells us in that regard. This is what we might call a spiritual antinomy. An antinomy is an apparent contradiction. When you look at that sentence and it says disunity and you link that together with unity, that makes no sense at all, Carlon. It is a spiritual antinomy. It's an apparent contradiction but it really isn't a contradiction at all. We've already seen what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to watch out for, keep an eye on those who Paul says will come in among us like fierce wolves. The reality is some of these people will literally come to your door and ring your doorbell and knock on your door. They will come to you, and they will have a Bible in their hand, but it isn't your Bible. They will talk to you about Jesus, but it isn't your Jesus. They will talk to you about salvation and the prospect of heaven but they're not talking about salvation and the prospect of heaven based on faith in Christ alone by grace alone. They have corrupted the gospel, and they are false teachers. They're

fierce false teachers. That doesn't mean we can't be kind. It doesn't mean we can't interact. It surely doesn't mean we can't share the gospel with them. But we need to understand that, as Paul says here, you better be watching out for them. You better be mindful that they're bringing you a different message from a different book, offering you a different Savior and a different way to supposedly get to heaven.

Now what do we do? How are we to respond? In two words Paul gives us the only imperative in these verses. The command is simply to avoid them. Avoid them. This is an often-repeated command. This is not a one-off in Paul's theology and in the way that he deals with these matters. I want you to see in 2Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13, this is what Paul says: "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away (avoid any brother, any sister) who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us." He says something very similar over in Titus chapter 3 and verse 10: "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned." Again, I say to you as I did at the beginning, that is alien language to our day and time, that we would literally avoid, that we would distance ourselves from somebody who is teaching that which is false.

Keep in mind the distinction here that Paul is making in chapter 16 is very different from what he said in Chapter 14. Maybe you're replaying some of chapter 14 and you're thinking Paul, I thought you were the apostle of welcome. I thought you were the apostle of love. I thought you were the apostle who said accept one another. That would all be a much better message for our world today. That was chapter 14. What were we dealing with in chapter 14? We were dealing with things of Christian liberty: days, diet, drink. We are not dealing with the orthodox doctrines of the faith. Chapter 16 he's talking about apostolic teaching and if you veer away from that, and if you cause division over that, and if you put obstacles in front of people that take them away from that, then he says you are to avoid them. Very different scenario. Very different circumstances. So, we have to keep that in mind. It doesn't mean nonessential things are not important. It means they're not the gospel and that's what we always have to be mindful of.

I'm personally not a big fan of heresy hunters. There are people who just make it their life call to search out any tentative heresy that they can find in anybody's teaching anywhere anytime anyplace. A lot of them have websites and webpages and some wonderful Bible teachers get thrown into their buckets as being those that we have to avoid. No, I don't think that's what Paul's calling us to at all. Do we have to be wise? Of course. Do we have to be discerning? Of course. But we don't have to become legalistic in our approach to this.

Now look at what he says. A description of the deceivers. Verse 18. "For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by smooth talking flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve." How does verse 18 begin? It begins with one of Paul's favorite all-time words. It begins with the word "for". He's explaining in verse 18 what he just said in verse 17, and he says they seem like nice guys. They smile a lot. Have you ever noticed that a lot of these guys that are on TV and present themselves in certain ways they're smiling all the time? When I was in seminary, I did my master's thesis on a man named Robert Schuller. Some of you that are a little older will remember that name. Robert Schuller was one of the most watched TV preachers all around the world for decades. He smiled all the time. Somebody asked him once why he smiled all the time. He said, "I smile all the time because the church has largely become negative, and they talk about sin all the time. I want to present something positive. I want to invite people in with my smile." He defined the original sin of Adam and Eve as not loving themselves enough. That was his definition of sin. If that's your definition of sin, I guess you go around and smile all the time. I'm not against people smiling all the time. Some of you are smiling at me right now. The point that we would make here is that's what Paul says about these guys.

He says about them their motivation first of all. They have no desire to honor Christ. They have no desire to honor Christ. Don't miss how Paul speaks about them. Look what he says. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ. They have no interest in the lordship of Christ. You and I should be obsessed with the lordship of Christ. That is all we should care about. The lordship of Christ 24/7. We should be obsessed with the lordship of Christ, submitting ourselves to the lordship of Christ in every area of our life, every moment of our life, every day of our life. These guys are

obsessed with themselves, and they're obsessed with how they're going to gain in this game that they're involved in. that's what they want.

Paul started off Romans chapter 1 verse 1 and said I, Paul. I'm an apostle. I'm a servant of Jesus Christ. *Doulos*. Servant. The lowest of the low slaves. He speaks of these as those who do not serve the Lord Christ. What do they serve? They serve self, self-interest, self-gratification. They are all about fame and fortune. They're about themselves, about the praise of men. Paul speaks of these in Philippians chapter 3. Listen in verse 18. This is what I mean. When you start reading the letters of the New Testament, the letters to the churches, this theme shows itself all over the place. Verse 18 of Philippians chapter 3. This is what Paul says: "For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly, and their glory is in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." That's who he is talking about. There's a lot of them today and sadly they fill a lot of pulpits across this land. They're in it for themselves.

Look at their methodology. They're smooth talkers. They're into flattery. The word flattery is the word *eulogeos*. Recognize that word? Eulogy. The word flattery is literally the word that we use for a eulogy. When you go to a memorial service or a funeral, somebody, sometimes more than one, gives a eulogy. Sometimes you turn to the person next to you and you say I didn't know that guy because the eulogy was so flattering and so different from what you knew him to be that there was this praise that you are not even familiar with. That's what he's talking about here.

With this methodology of smooth talking and flattery, who gets deceived? It's the naïve, the unsuspecting, the untaught. That's why it's so important that we be in the word. That's why it's so important that there's accountability with each other. That is the importance of small groups beyond this large group. So that we're not Ephesians 4. We're not tossed about by every wind of doctrine. I love this analogy. Some guy said we should know our Bible the way the grocery store clerk knows the grocery store. What aisle are the canned tomatoes? That would be aisle 18. That's true. That's the way we should be with the Bible. It doesn't mean necessarily that we can pull up every reference and every verse, but we ought to have a pretty good handle about where it is that we can find the truth that we're looking for in the word of God. If that were the case,

the warning that Paul gives here would certainly be one that would be in many ways minimized.

Notice lastly. There is a commendation and an admonition. Verse 19: "For your obedience is known to all so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." Two things here. The commendation is for their solid reputation. First part of verse 19. To have a solid reputation. Your obedience is known to all. What a great word. This is the goal. This is the goal of discipleship. The goal of discipleship is obedience. That's what we want to do. That's the outcome that we have in mind as we encourage each other, that we will be people who walk in obedience. Discipleship is simply encouraging each other to become more like Christ. It shows itself in different forms and different ways. We just want to be engaged in each other's life in a way that we encourage each other to be more like Christ.

Now look at the sound advice. Last part of verse 19: "but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." Two things. Be wise as to what is good. What is good? In this context it's the truth. It is orthodoxy. It's the apostles teaching. It's being a student of the word of God. Be wise in the word. Be innocent about evil. Be pure as it relates to evil. Be unmixed. It brings to mind Jesus's words in Matthew 10:16. I send you out into a world of wolves as sheep, but here's my encouragement to you. Be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. When I look at that 19th verse and especially that last part of that 19th verse, when he says I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil, that is one of my favorite prayers for our children and grandchildren. God, make them wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Make them know the goodness of your word, of your truth, and keep them from the evil that is so prevalent in our world. There are times when to maintain unity you actually have to divide.

What do we take away? Only a church that is founded on truth and growing in truth can be truly united. That's the unity that we want to have, the unity that we have in Christ. We want to be growing in our walk with God. We want to be vigilant, Paul says, but we also want to be humble. The thing that we rally around, the thing that unites us is the gospel, and that's what we get to celebrate.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you this morning for this word from Paul to us. It is so practical, so needed in our day and time. It reminds us of the world in which we live and yet, father, also reminds us that we really need to be mindful and watchful of what's going on within our own hearts, within with our own lives, within our own church. Lord, that we will be students of the word, growing in our walk with God, that we will be vigilant, watchful, avoiding that which is evil. Father, that we will be humble, that we will walk before you in humility, in truth. We thank you for this glorious gospel that we get to celebrate. In Jesus's name, amen.