



Protecting Gospel Ministry
Romans 16:17-23

Main Idea: Stay away from those who cause divisions and teach things that are contrary to what's clearly taught in Scripture.

Be on the look out to identify and to avoid false disciples (17-18).

- *False disciples cause divisions (17a).*
- *False disciples create obstacles to the gospel proclaimed in Romans (17b).*
- *False disciples serve themselves and not the Lord (18a).*
- *False disciples say things that sound really good (18b).*

In this passage, there is one, primary command: "Avoid them!" In the language of the New Testament, this word in context means to keep away from them, distancing yourself by turning away. Who is the "them?" From the description of those that we should avoid, the Lord makes it clear through Paul that the "them" are false disciples who teach a false gospel from false motives. There are four characteristics of false disciples that are revealed in these two verses. First, false disciples cause divisions. Divisions are always caused by the flesh. Division stems from sin, and it's a part of life in this fallen world, including life in the church. Divisions in the church come when doctrine and the practice of doctrine is compromised. Like a road that divides, a division is a move away from the truth. Additionally, false disciples create obstacles to the gospel proclaimed in Romans. Any obstacles to the true gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is an obstacle to the true gospel. Adding requirements (works) to the gospel or taking away from the gospel creates an obstacle. From the requirement of baptism, speaking in tongues, enough faith, or good works to the denial of repentance, obedience, and God's law, false disciples create obstacles in order to enslave the naive to depend on their teaching. In this, false disciples serve themselves and not the Lord, and they deceive the naive by saying things that sound really good. This is nothing new. It's Satan's plan of temptation from the very beginning in Genesis 3: "Did God really say...?" So the call is important: Be on the look out to identify false disciples. The command is critical: Avoid them!

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-19. What does Paul say about divisions in the church in Corinth? How do divisions reveal the flesh and sin? How have you seen or experienced divisions in a church? How was the flesh and sin revealed in that division, which is a move away from the truth?
2. What is the gospel? What are some common obstacles to the gospel? What are some specific ways we see "obstacles" today in the preaching and teaching of false disciples?
3. When it comes to serving the Lord or yourself, how do you evaluate your heart in connection to who you are truly serving? How can this be evaluated in the outcome and actions of someone in a leadership and teaching role in the church? What should we look for?
4. In Genesis 3, Satan tempted Adam and Eve with deceptive and attractive talk. How is this still the strategy of the enemy through false disciples and teachers in the church?
5. Are you looking out for false disciples? Are you avoiding them? How do you do that in today's age and culture of constant media and temptation at everyone's fingertips?



Let obedience be a witness to your faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (19-20).

- *True disciples are wise to what is good (19b).*
- *True disciples are innocent to what is evil (19b).*
- *True disciples trust in God's power to defeat Satan (20a).*
- *True disciples stand in God's grace alone (20b).*

Paul shifted from his warning about false disciples to his encouragement to true disciples in the church in Rome. The testimony of their obedience was a witness to their faith in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. He encouraged them with the testimony of their faith, and he continued to instruct them on important ways to protect their obedience by faith. First, Paul reminded them that true disciples are wise to what is good. How do we protect the true gospel and its application in our lives as the church? The answer to that question is to know what is good! True disciples must study the Word of God to know the Word of God in order to know the Lord and his unchanging truth that is good. Wisdom is the right application of knowledge. True disciples grow in wisdom in the Spirit as they are grounded in the truth of God's Word. Additionally, true disciples are innocent to what is evil. In other words, they know what evil is, but they reject it and do not participate in it. Notice how the first two characteristics are connected. These things work hand-in-hand. True disciples are wise to what is good and innocent to what is evil all because they are grounded in God's Word. Third, true disciples trust in God's power to defeat Satan. We know how the war ends. We know that the battles will result in victory. This is the hope of the true disciple in the struggle with Satan and sin in the world today! The final characteristic comes from Paul's prayer for the true disciples in Rome: True disciples stand in God's grace alone. God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is what we need and all we need. God's grace alone is what true disciples rest in and stand in every day.

1. Use the BlueLetterBible to study the words for "wise" and "good" as well as "innocent" and "evil." What is God's instruction in these verses? How do we cultivate wisdom for what is good? How do we grow in innocence to what is evil?
2. Why is it important to know God will crush Satan? What does it mean that he will crush Satan under "your feet," which is the church! How was this meant to encourage the church in Rome? How does it encourage the church today?
3. What does it mean for God's grace to be with us? Is his grace in Christ Jesus with you? Are you resting in his grace in your soul? Are you standing in his grace for your strength?
4. What does our obedience as the church testify to our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ? How does your obedience witness to your faith?