

In Conclusion

Romans 16:17-27

Scripture

"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. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. 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. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

It's amazing to me how Paul can transition from telling us to greet one another with a holy kiss to warning us about brothers who cause division. I wonder if in the back of Paul's mind he may have remembered what happened to Jesus in the garden when the one who had betrayed him

kissed him; not a holy kiss, but a kiss of betrayal. We don't kiss in our culture, but I think the same thing can be compared with that right hand of Christian fellowship when we reach our hand out to shake a brother or a sister's hand. Paul is telling us that we ought to give a strong right hand of fellowship to a brother or a sister.

Warning of False Teachings

Paul tells us to watch out because not everyone who gives a holy kiss or embraces you with a handshake ought to be part of your fellowship. He will warn us about the danger of teachers who teach false teachings. In Acts 20 when Paul was at Miletus, he called for the Ephesian elders and he reminded them of their responsibilities as overseers of the flock of God. By using that terminology about the flock of God, he no doubt picked up on Jesus' terminology of saying I am the good shepherd and referring to his followers as his sheep. Paul told the Ephesian elders to make sure they shepherded the flock of God. He reminded them that he had delivered to them the full council of God and now he was confident that the Church was going to be in good care under their leadership. But one of the things he told them was to get ready, because when he goes away fierce wolves are going to come into the congregation.

When our grandson was born, we taught him the song Old McDonald Had a Farm. But we taught him to sing Papaw and Memish had a farm, ei-ei-ei-oh, not Old McDonald. If you ask him about the animals on our farm, before he mentions the cow, Doddies, he always mentions the coyote-ohs. It's cute. Every time he comes to our house he wants to know if Memish has seen a coyote-oh. He knows that the coyote-oh's are the enemy of our cow herd. He's been trained to look and watch out for them. He will never go on the farm without his eyes open, looking to see if there is a coyote-oh anywhere close.

- **Be on Guard**

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul's heart as he finishes this great letter to the church at Rome and one of the last things that he warns them about is to be on guard at who shakes your hand? He is telling them to be on guard on who comes into your fellowship. He tells us to watch out; keep your

eyes open. This phrase, "*watch out,*" translates a Greek word, *skopos*, from which we get our words *telescope* and *microscope*. The word literally means 'to look intently in or for, to scrutinize, to study, it means to examine.'

When we first came to Hardin, we had the privilege of being the pastor and youth pastor at the same time and it was really awesome. As a young man back then, I had the energy to actually pastor the church and still have enough energy left over for the young people of our church. I was teaching an auditorium class in between our early morning and late service downtown, and some of the parents came to me and asked if I would give up teaching the adult Sunday school class and teach our high-school students. So I became really close to a generation of young people in our church. I'll never forget this one time, and I think they meant this in an honorable way, but one time, three or four of the young guys who had just gotten their driver's license got together, and came to me and wanted to know if I wanted to go scoping with them. Now, terminology is always changing among young people, but when I heard the word, *scoping*, being a young man and a Greek student, I was a little leery. I thought what those boys meant was they wanted to know if I wanted to get into their car and go to town and scope. I was really careful about what we were going to scope because I knew there were certain things that were lawful for a pastor to scope, and I knew there were some things that were unlawful for a pastor to scope. And I knew as a pastor who was married that there were certain things I shouldn't be involved in. So I asked the young guys what we were going to go scoping for, and they said girls! I knew then that I didn't have any business going scoping. Scoping - what a word - I don't know if we do this well!

- **Wolves in Sheep's Clothing**

In the Bible, we are compared to sheep, and we do have a nature to herd, or to flock together. But we have an enemy named Satan, and he would love to send some wolves in sheep's clothing into our fellowship and cause division and obstacles that are contrary to the doctrine we have been taught. Now, I struggle with this. When somebody comes in and they shake my hand and we begin to talk, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt. There are many churches that have never been the same because

they didn't keep their eyes open for wolves in sheep's clothing; even those fierce wolves that never made a doubt about who they were. Paul warns us to scope, to look, to bring people's teaching into focus and compare it to what we have been taught from God's Word. He warns us that there are some people who like to come in to the Church and cause division. I know we can't imagine that, but what Paul is saying is that not everybody who comes into the Church has pure motives; not everybody is out for the same thing. This word, "*division*," is where we get our English word **dichotomy** from. It means 'to divide into, to make a separation.' There is strength and help among the sheep when the sheep stay together. The ploy of a false teacher is always to divide and conquer. He comes into a church building and with his teaching, he actually pulls certain people away from the protection of the flock, from following the true shepherd, and they will begin to follow him.

- **Obstacles**

Paul said a false teacher creates obstacles. In my opinion, the English translators just didn't go far enough here. To me, an obstacle is something that causes you to trip and fall. When you trip and fall, you always get back up. It's not a big deal. To me, an obstacle just causes you to stumble but you don't lose focus; you don't lose the ability to get back up and get back into the race. That is not the word here. The word here is **skandalon**, from where we get our English word, 'scandal.' This is not talking about immorality and those kinds of scandals that we see in Washington DC, or we hear about in pulpits from time to time. The word, **skandalon**, was used among the hunters of the New Testament and it referred to a trap. If you have ever been trapping, you know that you have a steel trap. There is a trigger on the trap, and you put the bait on the trigger and set it. When the animal goes for the bait, he trips the trigger and the trap spring releases, then he is trapped. That's the picture. There will be false teachers who will come in amongst God's flock and they will bait us. What's the purpose? The purpose is to get us from following the shepherd of the church to following them. It ultimately leads to the sheep's ruin as the sheep gets out from under the protection of the flock.

Now, I struggle with what Paul says next because I want to give everybody the benefit of the doubt; I want to believe people don't mean to do what

they do sometimes. But Paul just flat out says that these people aren't serving Christ, they are serving their own hunger. They are not serving to point people to the glory of Christ. They are not pointing people to the church or bringing them into unity of the church. They are trying to separate them from the flock because they are not servants of Christ.

The word, "*serve*," is a strong word that means 'to be a slave to.' These folks aren't slaves to Christ. They haven't brought themselves under His lordship in its totality, but they are serving their own belly. Do you get it? They are not motivated from God; they are motivated from their flesh. Wow! That is always a danger at any church. You have to keep your eyes open. We need to be alarmed when we see people being led away from the flock of God. Paul doesn't tell us to debate them or to argue with them, he says to avoid them!

This word, "*avoid*," is interesting. In the Greek New Testament, it literally means 'to swerve.' The picture here is you going on your merry little way, and all of a sudden you meet someone who is causing division, and you are supposed to swerve around that person. We aren't supposed to give them the time of day, because these folks aren't sincere! These folks aren't redeemable; they don't want to know the truth. They want to create a following of their own. Paul just says flat out, avoid them, stay away from them; swerve. The Church has sometimes handled it the wrong way. Sometimes, we actually give people a platform to spout their false teaching, and the church of Jesus Christ should never do that. We should be so secure in what we know Scripture teaches that when it comes to this issue, there will be no debate and we will not allow wrong teaching to enter our ears, or our fellowship. We are just going to swerve and go in another direction.

- **Wisdom**

He tells us to watch and to swerve, and now he tells us to "*be wise*." He gives the Roman church a compliment and says, wow, I am proud of you and I rejoice with you because your obedience is known everywhere. Paul isn't writing to them to correct false teaching; he knows they have the true gospel. He is giving them his gospel so that they will know his gospel is their gospel, and they are on the same page.

You see, Paul was going to be a missionary in Spain. I have discovered that if you are going to have someone support you, the last thing you want to do is get somewhere and the support get cut off because they find out something about you that they didn't like. I can't tell you how many people try to hold things back from their supporters! Paul was a missionary who laid out the theological beliefs of what his gospel was to the Roman church so they could examine it. He wanted them to send him to Spain and to be able to financially support him.

Recognize Authenticity

He brags on them about their obedience and then said I want you to be wise when it comes to things that are good. He said I don't want you to ever get mixed up in evil. He is not talking about immorality here; he is talking about false teaching. He is saying not to get caught up with people who are going to cause divisions and strife and lead people to ruin in the church. How do we do this? What is Paul getting at when he says to be wise unto that which is good and don't get mixed up with evil? I believe the key to knowing what is false is to know what is true.

I get scared when my wife sends me to the store with a hundred dollar bill because she didn't have a twenty. I've never had anybody examine a twenty when I lay it down, but I can never go into a store with a hundred and they just put it in the drawer. I think, *what am I going to do if this thing's not real?* They mark it with some kind of felt pen, and then the clerk looks for something. I don't have a clue what she's looking for, but I'm telling you, when she puts that felt pen across it and then looks at it, my heart pounds thinking what would I do if this thing is false? I just know she is going to push a button under there and the cops are going to come and I'm going to be taken off and arrested! That won't look good in the Murray Ledger and Times...It would read, "Pastor passing counterfeit \$100 bills." But here is what I know; what they are looking for is not the false, they are looking for the genuine. I've been told that when bankers train their tellers, they train them to spot the counterfeit by knowing the authentic. They don't waste a lot of time looking at counterfeit hundreds because there are too many different ways to counterfeit a bill. They are taught to handle the authentic and recognize it.

That is what Paul is telling the church at Rome. I believe one of the reasons a church is not marred by bad reputation because of fights, or splits, or divisions, is because it is keen to understand the authenticity of the true gospel. There will always be people come and go who will not believe the same way, but what's important is to never give a platform to anyone whose teaching does not measure up to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, these guys are smooth and they are slick. They get into your heart, the heart of the naïve, through the way they talk. We need to be careful not to make a decision about someone's spirituality and anointing from God by the way he can deliver words or a lesson. We need to note the content of his message. We must know the truth. This is a call for us to continue in the Word of God.

In verse 20, Paul said, "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*" I have just always assumed this was a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and it may be. I'm not really sure if that is what it is, but I want to tell you where I'm leaning, but also telling you I may be wrong. Do you see the language of Paul here? He said that the God of peace will *rapidly* crush Satan under your feet. He talked about the church encountering teaching that is false which leads to division and ruin in the church, and he just told us to be wise. We are in a battle, amen? We are in a war; this is not peace time. You can't come into church, you can't be the church, with your civilian clothes on all the time. You have to have your war wardrobe on; you are a soldier. He is telling the church at Rome that because of their obedience and authenticity to trust, it will not be long before God will crush Satan under their feet, and it's going to be rapid. I have no doubt that Paul is alluding to Genesis 3:15, **the protoevangelium**, the first gospel announcement. It looked like Satan won in the garden. The serpent did its job and ruined God's plan for man, it seems; man is getting kicked out of the garden. When God talked to the serpent, He said something amazing; He said you're going to strike at the woman's seed, you're going to strike at her heel, but she will bruise your head. I believe Scripture teaches that in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, God defeated Satan once and for all in that decisive act. Satan has been defeated! I Corinthians 15 clearly teaches that Christ is now reigning over His kingdom until He puts His last enemy under His feet, and the last enemy will be death. He is going to reign until death

is defeated, and I believe that will be at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

How do we reconcile this passage? Even though Satan has been defeated, I don't think he knows it. I don't think he realizes it, so he raises his ugly little head and it's usually through somebody in the church. Paul is telling the church to keep on fighting the battle because, rapidly, when you are wise, when you swerve, and when you watch, God will crush Satan under your very feet, and you will trample all over him! We have the promise of Scripture that not just at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but every day in our life, we can, and should, be victorious over Satan.

But what we don't realize is that Satan doesn't come at us in full disclosure. He comes cloaked in some well-meaning people that we cannot discern that they are really not of us. I want to encourage you to always examine the nature of the teaching and the nature of the teacher. Teaching always has to line up with the doctrine of Scripture. Please don't ever easily let go of what you've been taught. Don't assume, because a smooth talker comes along, that he is right and you have been led wrong. You have to be willing to see into the heart of the teacher, to see if the teacher of God's Word is not leading people to be grounded in the Word, or bringing them into the fellowship of the church. We need to be aware if people are being led to believe the teacher's interpretation of Scripture and are, therefore, being led away from the church to being a follower of the teacher. We must watch, we must swerve, and we must be wise. The grace of God will be with us.

Doxology

In these next verses, Timothy and three other guys get in on giving greetings to the church at Rome. Paul dictated his words to a man who wrote this letter, and Paul gives him permission to greet the church; his name was Tertius. Then, we have a greeting from a couple of other guys, and we come to the conclusion of Romans. You should compare this doxology to Romans 3:21-26. I believe that Romans 3:21-26 succinctly summarizes everything that Paul teaches in the book of Romans. But if you want to see the entire Bible succinctly summarized, you should look at this doxology.

"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

Wow! Is that succinct? There is not a wasted word here. Paul finishes with praise to God. "*Now to him who is able,*" our English word, 'dynamite,' comes from this Greek word. It's not referring to power, necessarily, but the ability to accomplish its intended purpose; to reach its intended goal. God is able; God has the ability to strengthen you. This word, "*strengthen,*" means to 'make stand.' It is where we get our English concept of 'to prop up; to make something stand that couldn't stand.' God is able to make you stand; God is able to prop you up. Paul isn't just tacking this on at the end. He has just been talking about someone in the church leading someone to ruin, and now he's saying hold it, I don't want you to be scared. I want you to know that your God has the ability to keep you standing as a Christian during your battles here on this earth. You don't have to go down. How does He strengthen me? Paul said, "*according to my gospel.*" Paul is saying I laid the gospel that I preach out before you and it lines up with your gospel, and the source of our strength is the gospel.

In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." What is Paul doing here in the end? He is telling you that through the gospel, God not only has the power to save you from sin; God has the power through the gospel to sustain you from sin and to complete in you what He started in this thing called sanctification.

Paul says it is according to the gospel and "*the preaching of Jesus Christ.*" I think Paul is summarizing everything that was said in Romans. In the gospel, God has dealt with what was wrong with man; He dealt with our sin. In His son, God judged us as sinners, and by His grace through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, He has brought us who were sinners into a right

relationship with Him. We now stand before God justified. Justified means made right. I am right with God, not based on anything I have done, but based on what God has done. When God saved me, He didn't put new clothes on an old man. According to the gospel, He put a new man in the old clothes and then, He immediately said son, change your clothes. Three of you smiled. You the new man in Christ who is alive to God and dead to sin. You can't keep wearing the clothes that the old man who was alive to sin and dead to God wore. How does God strengthen us; how does he give us the ability to stand? He does that through the gospel.

Paul said, "*according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret.*" Some people can't keep a secret. You know when you let the secret out too soon it spoils the party, amen? God had a secret and it was hidden for ages, but has now been disclosed and is now being made known. This is not a Perry Mason mystery or a Hardy Boys mystery where you got to solve something. "*Mystery,*" in the Greek language means 'something that was a secret was made known.' Until the apostles came along, people didn't know that the reason God chose Israel as a nation was so that there could be a Messiah born, and when this Messiah was born He would go to a cross and die; and the purpose for Him dying was not only to reconcile man to God, but to reconcile man to man. This is what Romans teaches. God's plan in Christ was to bring Jews and Gentiles together and form one new man and that be the church of Jesus Christ. It would be a church with no division, a church with no partitions, a church with no second class or third class citizens, no VIP seating. In Christ, there is neither male nor female; neither Jew, nor Gentile; bond, or slave; but one.

Paul tells us that "*Through the prophetic writings,*" now that Christ has come and the secret is out, we have a guide to understanding the Old Testament that we didn't have before. We now read the prophetic writings through the lens of Jesus Christ. Now, you can take Jesus and go to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, to Jeremiah, Amos, and Malachi and say wow, here's what the prophets were writing about, and they didn't have a clue! But God knew what those guys were writing about, and the fulfillment is Jesus Christ. And we have been commanded to take this message to all the nations.

God's plan was never to just save the Jews. God's plan was to never to just be kind to America. God loves the entire world, and out of every tribe, every tongue, every people group, and every language, there will be a representation in heaven who will praise God forever and ever and ever. It's the gospel that brings the nation to obedience. Paul started Romans 1 with the phrase obedience of faith. This phrase means there will come a day when the gospel is preached and people's lives will be broken into by God with the gospel. At that moment, they will either obey the gospel, or they will disobey the gospel. The gospel is a command to repent and to believe in God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. When the gospel is preached, the obedience of faith is faith. Faith is saying amen to God.

In Genesis 15, Abram looked up in the stars and God said count the stars and that is how many kids you will have. The Bible says Abram said *aman*, 'let it be so.' This is where we get our English word 'amen.' The English translates that word as believed. Abram *amen'ed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. The moment Abraham believed what God said was true about him; he was brought into a right relationship with God.

God said here is what I did for you. I put my Son on a tree and I took all of your sins. You can be made right with Me if you put your full faith and trust in Him, and turn from trust in yourself or what you can do. When a sinner hears what God has done and says *Aman*, let it be true, at that moment, he is brought into a right relationship with God. The one who gets the glory is God, through Jesus Christ, the only wise God.

Influence of Romans

In 1534, William Tyndale translated the Bible from Greek to English, at a great price to himself and to those who aligned with him. There are only two copies out of 18,000 printed that are still in existence today. He put a note in the prologue to Romans. In it, he encouraged those who understood English to realize that Romans was bread for their soul and they needed to eat from Romans day by day. This is the book that caused the protestant reformation that almost led Martin Luther to insanity. He was so tired of believing that he had to do something to be made right

with God, knowing the moment that he did something right, he was going to immediately do something wrong again. It was Romans that brought him to the truth that the only way he could be made right with God was through faith in Jesus Christ because of God's grace. Pope Leo X put out a papal bull against Martin Luther saying that he was a wild boar in God's vineyard. No, he was a man who had God break into his life with Scripture and he responded to that Scripture.

You and I owe much to the men and the women who brought the church back to the central message of the Bible. That message is salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, on the basis of Scripture alone. ~Amen~