

Romans 16:17-23

- I. **Introduction** – Paul’s closing admonition is to watch out for false teachers. They would sneak into the church, even arising from among the gathered church. These teachers would teach false doctrines that are contrary to what the Apostles taught. This is not some minor issue. Paul is not talking here about disagreements over minor points of doctrine. He is writing about those who have changed the Gospel by what they teach. They have developed a false message that cannot save. How then are we to be proactive in guarding our hearts and the church against false doctrine?
- II. **Watch out for those who cause division and create obstacles** (v. 17).
 - a. **Proverbs 6** tells us there are six things the Lord hates: two of them are *a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers*. In **Matthew 7:15**, Jesus warns His listeners to: *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*. Elsewhere, Paul, in **Titus 3:10** writes: *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him*. He is telling believers to have nothing to do with those who cause division.
 - b. While we may not be able to be certain exactly who Paul has in mind here, we can be sure there are many who fit the mold of Paul’s warning. He has written in this letter at various points about those who cause division and create obstacles. In other letters he would address other false teachers and teachings that had crept into the church. We need to be constantly watching for divisions and obstacles that arise when false doctrine is taught.

III. Guard against the deception of false teachers (v. 18).

- a. False teachers are not servants of the Lord. They may claim His name and His power, but they are not serving Him. They only seek to serve themselves. Whether they are looking for notoriety or fame, they are not seeking to make His name known. They may want you to plant seeds in their ministry or pay for their lavish lifestyle. They do this in direct opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Again, these are no minor disagreements of peripheral issues.
- b. These teachers use smooth talk and flattery to deceive the naïve. They will build division by telling others falsehood. They will often be very flashy and sound spiritual. However, their goal is to lead any astray who will listen to their lies.

IV. Do not become complacent in your correct doctrine (v. 19).

- a. It will be easy for you this morning to dismiss much of this message because you believe that your doctrine. You could easily believe that your beliefs are solid and you would not and could not be deceived into believing something that is false. This is a dangerous assumption. It is a deadly assumption. Paul tells the church at Rome that their obedience is known to other believers. However, he still commends them to be wise to what is good. They obey God, but that does not mean they could not fall into false doctrine. They could be the naïve ones who are lead astray if they thought themselves wise instead of actually being wise to what is good. Division is evil. If they were not wise, they would find themselves divided, a victim of evil.

V. Rest in the Lord's promise to destroy the work of Satan (vv. 20-23).

- a. **He will crush Satan** (v. 20). The Lord will fulfil the promise of **Genesis 3:15** and crush Satan. He will not deceive forever. He

will not put obstacles in the way. We should rest in this promise. We must guard against false teachers in our church and keep them out of our homes and minds. However, we should not be discouraged when we see their work. They will fail. It should redouble our work in sharing Christ's Gospel.

b. He brings unity among different brothers (vv. 21-23). In His victory over Satan, Jesus has brought together people who would not be together otherwise. He destroys divisions. This list of people represents Jew and Greek. People from various cities and various backgrounds. They have been assembled into Paul's missionary team. The true Gospel does this. It brings people together for the glory of God. This is a glaring reason why false teachers are so wicked. They try to divide what God seeks to join together.

VI. Challenge – Are you taking the proper precautions against false teachers? Do not be lax in this area. Do not put false teachings in your mind because you like the presentation or get some emotional satisfaction for the message. The Lord hates deception and division. He hates those who distort His Gospel. Most of us expose ourselves to truth far less that we should. We do not study the Word as often as we should. We do not listen to biblical teaching as often as we should. Why then would we devote any time to false teaching and false teachers who only seek to lift themselves up and lead us astray.