

**ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH**  
**LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14**

**LESSON 56 – PAUL’S FINAL WARNING – Romans 16:17-27**

We as Christians understand one part of the Bible pretty well...the love part. God is love. Right? Unfortunately, for the most part, Christians choose not to understand the part about calling out false doctrine and those who teach it. When we get to the end of Romans 16, it almost seems like Paul switches to another book. Paul just finished a section of personal greetings and now changes to a strong warning. What’s going on?

Well...the warning actually fits perfectly. His greeting in the first 16 verses are a testimony to the unity of the church. There is great diversity in the names Paul listed and that speaks to the unity they share in Christ...a unity that Paul wants to see preserved. This is exactly why he shifts gears to warn the Roman church about those who might come in and try to destroy the unity they have. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is one of the greatest challenges in the church.

All over America, churches are being torn apart by division and strife...frequently caused by some who came in for that very purpose. So Paul’s warnings are applicable for every church that wants to maintain unity and peace.

**The Menace of False Teachers in the Church**

In the church, there are disagreements and then there are DISAGREEMENTS. Obviously, not all of these are of the same importance. We are all different and our disagreements will be different but when it comes to the doctrine of the church, the disagreements reach a whole new level of seriousness.

Paul says to watch out for those who teach doctrines contrary to the Word of God because of their potential for destroying the unity and peace of the church. Sometimes Christians get confused about these kinds of warnings. Aren’t we supposed to love and accept each other? Of course we are...but not at the expense of the fellowship of the body of Christ.

Paul goes even further... We are not to just identify them, we are to reject them and keep away from them. We are not to debate and argue with them. Now...this sounds really anti-Christian to some but reading Paul’s words to the elders in Ephesus helps us understand even more his words to the Romans here in chapter 16. In Acts 20, Paul warned the leaders in Ephesus to keep watch over themselves and all the flock and protect it from the savage wolves that would come in and destroy them.

If this were the only place in the New Testament where Paul addresses this issue, you might think it was a rare occurrence. But warnings against false teachers come consistently from the apostles, proving it is an ongoing problem the church will face. In Galatians 1, Paul says even if he or an angel from heaven declares something different from the Gospel the Galatians received, he should be cursed. That is a strong warning!

It turns out that Paul’s concerns about the church in Rome were well founded. When he finally got to Rome as a prisoner and wrote the letter to Philippians from jail, he talked about how some in Rome were preaching Christ selfishly...motivated by envy and strife. So Paul was not being paranoid...he was being realistic...and we should be realistic as well.

## **The Motivation of False Teachers in the Church**

What motivates those who teach false doctrine and destroy the unity of the church? Their motivation is their own carnal, self-centered interests. Whether their motivation is greed, fame or notoriety...it is anything but service to the Lord. While appearing godly on the outside, on the inside they are worldly, desiring their own glory instead of God's. Here is where watching becomes so important because over time, those who seek their own glory will become obvious. Pride and selfish ambition cannot stay hidden to the spiritually discerning.

## **The Methods of False Teachers in the Church**

Paul gives two specific methods that false teachers use in the church...smooth talk and flattery. They use these two tools to achieve their ultimate purpose...“to deceive the minds of naïve people.” It's so important when new Christians come into the body that they be disciplined by those who are mature in the faith. It is always the weak, young and immature believers the false teachers go after.

Notice these warnings about the methods of false teachers in the church...

- Titus 1:10-11, “For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.”
- 2 Timothy 3:6, “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.”
- 2 Peter 2:12-16, “But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.”
- Jude 11-13; 16, “Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever. These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.”

Discernment is the key word in these situations. Learning to listen to the Holy Spirit and letting Him guide into the truth is extremely important. I've seen good and godly people be deceived

and carried off into theological and practical error because they were not careful. Sometimes Christians don't have the heart or the courage to reject a false teacher.

False teachers aren't going to announce themselves and tell you they are here to teach you false doctrine. You must look beneath the surface and make sure that they are teaching the truth of God's Word. Sadly, not everyone who comes into the church carrying a Bible is there for righteous purposes.

### **The Mindset of False Teachers in the Church**

How should we live day to day when the possibility of false teachers is always present? Well...we aren't supposed to live in fear, but in confidence... encouraged moment by moment with the truth.

Paul commends the church for their obedience, saying it has become known to all. The Roman church was an important church for many reasons. The greater an impact any church...or individual...is having, the greater the impact a spiritual failure will have. Because the church in Rome was famous for its faith, they were an attractive target for those who sought to destroy that faith.

The principle of Luke 12:48 comes into play... "from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded." Paul was holding the Roman church to a high standard of accountability because of its widely known faith. Letting pride and arrogance replace humility would be an open invitation to those who would seek to divide and conquer.

Jeremiah the prophet rebuked the carnal Israelites for being skilled in doing evil and not knowing how to do good. That is exactly the opposite of how we're supposed to live. We are not to become like the world...worldly wise and spiritually ignorant. Some people think they need to read ten books on cults and false doctrine and live on the defensive. Paul says to focus on God and the good, and be simple concerning evil. Knowing the Word of God is the best defense against false doctrine.

You don't have to be an expert in false doctrine. Just ask these three questions...

1. Does this person's teaching agree with Scripture?
2. Does it honor Jesus?
3. Does it promote goodness?

If the answer to any one of these is, "No," then don't have anything to do with the person or the teaching.

Paul's warnings about false teachers should be taken to heart by every Christian. Live in peace...not in paranoia. Study the truth...not error. Be innocent and confident. Stand in grace and live in hope. If the time comes, separate yourself from error and those who teach it...immediately and without apology. You don't need any excuse for defending the truth...you only need a reason. This is what the Word of God requires of all who would live faithfully for Him.

Paul finishes Romans with one of his several benedictions in the book...asking that the grace of Jesus would be with them. In the midst of the spiritual battles of this world, we can have grace and peace through Jesus. Paul focuses on grace as the theme of the Christian life. We are saved by grace and kept by grace. Where would we be without the grace of God?