

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. **18** For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. **19** For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. **20** And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen. (NKJV)

Air travel is an amazing thing. Every day millions of people get in glorified aluminum cans and fly 5 miles above the earth's surface in vehicles that, without power, are destined to fall to the ground at 120 mph. I may have picked a bad time to mention this seeing that Suz and Carla are going to be on one of those tomorrow.

Now some people enter those jets without a care. It never even dawns on them the position they will be in if the jet malfunctions. They simply expect that the jet will **function without failure**, even though there are thousands of parts that could fail in that jet.

Then there are others who absolutely refuse to fly, even though, statistically the chance of being in a plane that will crash is 1 in 11 million and the chance that you will die in a car crash is 1 in 5000.

Both extremes are not looking at the risks realistically.

The same is true for evaluating false teachers.

There are some who blithely believe that if people say that they believe the Bible, and that the Bible is good, and Jesus is nice, that we should accept them and their teaching without question. They see **being critical** as tacky and unloving. And they say that the Christian attitude is that we ought to just be one big happy family, no matter what teachings are really at the heart of the matter.

Then there are others who see a false teacher under every bush. If a person is sloppy with their semantics, or they misunderstand a point of scripture, or even if they have a different opinion about a passage, they should be taken out and hanged. I have even been accused of being a pelagian or a semi-pelagian because I believe that sanctification is synergistic. You don't have to understand the words to see what this is. It ends up being a witch hunt on the fine degrees of doctrine. As Brad is fond of pointing out, we need to walk in a balance. We need to walk the thin road between the two errors. There is false doctrine and there are false teachers. Those false teachers will not post that fact on their name cards or their business cards. They will usually carefully hide that fact on their web pages. And they will use our vocabulary but not our dictionary in an effort to deceive us.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 tells us **For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14** And no wonder! For

Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (NKJV)

If we think about that even for a moment, we immediately see that caution is required. We can't just trust the "you can trust me buddy" handshake and smile. We truly do need to analyze what they are selling, what they believe, what they preach. We must be inwardly critical and analytical. We are told in this verse that evil knows how to make itself **look good**. From just impressions, the undiscerning will think this thing that **looks good IS good**. And nothing could be more wrong. So we must hold up the **gold standard- scripture-** to any doctrine that is being pushed. And it lives or dies based on that comparison.

But suppose we find an error. Do we then get out the noose for a lynching? That isn't what Paul did. Remember Aquilla and Priscilla? How did they deal with the error of Apollos? Did they condemn him as a false teacher because he was wrong about his doctrine? No. They took the word of God to him to see how he would respond. That is always the litmus test of a true believer. If a person will submit to the word of God at all points, he is a believer. Nothing else would cause such an abnormal condition in a person on this planet. If a person will listen and submit to scripture, no matter what their original error, they are not a false teacher. They may have preached wrong doctrine, but it was from ignorance, not arrogance. Also, look at what Paul just got done teaching us in chapters 14 and 15. There are lots of places where we will disagree about what scripture means and how scripture should be applied. He couldn't have made that any clearer. So is a person a false teacher because they don't agree with **end times timelines**, or how a worship service should be conducted, or how church leadership should be structured, or what day of the week we should come together to worship? No. A million times no. That is not what a false teacher is.

Here is a fresh example of one of these issues. This week I listened to "This momentary marriage" by John Piper. It is excellent and I hope to distribute this to you folks soon. It was amazingly insightful and thoroughly helpful. But John Piper holds the view that even the marriage of non-believers portrays, by the nature of God creating the institution of marriage, a picture of Christ's undying covenant love to His people. I disagree. I think what Christ said about marriage to the Pharisees was talking only about true marriage which is only aptly displayed by true followers of Christ. The two assumptions lead to some very different applications of divorce and remarriage. The beautiful thing is, this difference of opinion by an expert the caliber of Mr Piper and a novice like me does not, for a moment, make either of us out to be evil or a false teacher. Clearly one of us is wrong about the point and maybe one of us is right. But if he is correct, that does not make me a false teacher. And if I am correct, that doesn't make him one.

Paul, in our text, will help us to avoid the error of wrongly condemning a person as a false teacher, just as he has helped us in the rest of the book to determine what true teaching is. We should be very prepared for this morning's lesson from what Paul has taught us already.

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

The word for **note those** is the greek word we get the word "scope" from, like a microscope or telescope or rifle scope. Those of us who hunt can easily get what this means. When you are hunting and you finally see your prey, you put your scope on it and watch that animal intensely until you pull the trigger. This act is full of intensity. That is the kind of scoping out we should do with those who cause unnecessary divisions. That is not to say that our intent should be the same. We are not to kill false teachers. But we should have great intensity in watching their actions toward the flock. And note that this is not addressed to the elders of the church. It is addressed to the members of the flock. It is all our responsibilities. It is an even greater responsibility to the elders.

Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. 32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (NKJV)

Note in this passage that Paul points out that he has already told this audience the whole counsel of God. Basically, that is the gospel message properly understood and thoroughly applied. We are not capable of protecting the flock from danger until we adequately understand the gospel. But once we do understand the gospel, we have everything we need to detect error, and eventually, the evil motives of false shepherds.

Here Paul says watch. This means to give strict attention to, take heed in such a way nothing will distract you from maintaining that watch. So we see the same kind of command from Paul in Romans as in Acts.

Elders are to be like sheep herders. They basically are tasked with the responsibility of standing between the dangers and the sheep. And in this case, the dangers ARE the **false sheep** that are inside and the **wolves** that are outside.

after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Some will come in and some will rise up. And elders need to keep watching for both of those dangers. Elders can't afford to be idealistic, thinking that all is well if everyone is smiling. We need to know what each other is thinking so we can protect each other from **where** some of those thoughts will take us.

Then it says "Speaking perverse things".

What is that talking about? We normally associate the word perverse with something sexual, but that is not what the word means. Here it means to corrupt and so turn aside from. Corrupt what? Well they are speaking **these things**. So it most naturally means that these people would be corrupting the clear gospel message and turning away from it.

Our text says note those who **cause divisions contrary to the doctrine which you learned**. So we see that in both cases **it is the gospel** that we use to decide who is a false teacher.

In one case the teachers are corrupting the gospel message. In the other they are causing divisions that the gospel does not create. Therefore the danger is teaching other than the gospel. Teaching aimed at dividing some out of the flock so they can be preyed on by this false sheep.

False teachers will always differentiate themselves by the way that they depart from the Gospel. There are quite a few very well selling authors that are promoting distortions of the gospel. In one popular instance the author writes in such a way to appeal to anyone who is tired of suffering at the hands of hypocritical Christians. He creates a straw man by equating hypocritical Christianity with doctrinally pure Christianity. Then he proceeds to tear down the straw man that he created by criticizing the hypocrisy. He appeals to a much cooler Christianity, a much more inclusive Christianity. It no longer consists of doctrine. It is a conversation, a discussion. And hidden between the lines is a belief that Jesus Christ is really **not** the only way, the only truth, and the only life. He appears to really believe Christ is **not** the only way to the Father. He appears **not** to believe that there is no other name under heaven or earth whereby a person can be saved. In the end he says that love wins and what is meant by that is a universalism whereby every human will eventually be saved. That is the kind of things that false teachers will always do. They will present a gospel that is cooler than the gospel, more pleasant than the gospel, easier to accept than the gospel, easier to sell than the gospel. And they will seek to cut you from the true flock.

There is a simple rule of thumb here. Did you have good teaching from your parents or a Sunday school teachers when you were kids? If so, if any future teacher is telling you that people are saved in a different way than your Sunday school teacher or your parents, you might be dealing with a false teacher.

Oh, before we go further I wanted to note two more things. Notice our text says **note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**

There are some who would condemn everyone who says anything that is divisive. Paul is not such a person. Neither was Christ. Christ said,

Matthew 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. **35** For I have come to *'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'*; **36** and *'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'* **37** He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. **38** And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. **39** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

(NKJV)

The gospel is divisive. Those who present it clearly will cause division between people. So being divisive is not the issue here. The issue is being divisive in a way that the gospel does not cause. **Divisions contrary to the doctrine you learned.**

A lot of preachers are proud of their imagined ultra orthodoxy, but in reality many have simply created ways to divide out those that Christ would include. Their additions to the Gospel create unnecessary division. They are ignoring the teaching of Paul in Romans 14 and 15 regarding loving those who they differ with. Instead they are creating dogma that excludes some true believers right from the get-go. They confuse their intolerance of other's **ideas** about scripture with a proper zeal for the truth. And while thinking themselves the purest of the churches they come dangerously close to being marked as false teachers.

The second point is that Paul says "avoid them". John MacArthur makes the point that some people should be denounced, not debated. I like how he puts this. There is no end to the give and take with people who are truly believers, people who are open to finding out what scripture really says. That process may take a great deal of effort and time, but it is productive. It is worthwhile.

But sometimes in that process you come to realize that there really is no give and take. The person you are dealing with is never going to submit to God's word. That person has a fleshly agenda and it will not be submitted to the will of God. If that person persists in wanting to influence the church with that false doctrine, the

leadership has no choice but to act on that by announcing their determination and letting the flock know that this person is to be avoided.

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Those who are such- these people who preach a false gospel, an unnecessarily divisive doctrine, aren't really servants of Christ. They might appear to be overly sincere and very zealous. But whatever they are, they are not true servants of Christ. People who love Christ love Christ's sheep. They make it a point to know how to tell the difference. And they seek to include everyone that Christ includes and exclude everyone that Christ excludes. So if they are attempting to **separate people out of the flock for their purposes** out or to get people out of the flock that should not be excluded, you can be confident that there is something false about them. They are serving someone. But it isn't Christ.

So what is their motivation?

Paul says they serve **their own belly**. This word could also mean gullet. It means to be given up to the pleasures of the palate. It would not be a far reach to include any appetite. But clearly the motivation is a fleshly one. These people are not motivated to give up their lives for the good of their sheep. They are not serving for a spiritually good motivation. No, it is more like the other way around. They will exploit the good of the sheep so the false preachers can be fed. Ultimately getting the pleasure of eating is what the false teacher is motivated by.

There are other passages that would expand this motivation to any fleshly advantage. It always comes down to money, sex or power or a combination of the above. And you can sometimes tell the motivation because if anything gets between them and what they love, there will be a war. For Paul, if anyone put his sheep in danger there would be a war. These false teachers might pretend to care about that. But what they really care about is their selfish advantage. And that is all.

by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

The word for smooth words is interesting. It means fair speaking, the smooth and plausible address which simulates goodness.

Do you get that? It is speech that sounds right. Do you know what that means? It is language that your seamer won't catch. It seems **right**. It makes sense. It holds together. There is truth in it. In fact there is a spin of goodness in it. It seems like a very good thing. There are things that appeal to fair play and inclusiveness.

There are things that may even take off God's rough edges in our way of thinking. It will seem pleasant. But there is only one thing wrong with it. It is a lie.

When you are discerning truth and error, never simply trust **your intuition** about a message. Don't trust how it seems to you. Because these people are experts with your seemers. You have got to test it with the word of God.

Now the next word for flattering speech may sound very familiar to you. It is Eulogeo. Guess what English word we get from that? Eulogy. Those are the words spoken of the dead, normally on their accomplishments. The word in Greek means a fine discourse, polished language. In the sense in this text, it is language **artfully adapted to captivate the hearer**.

I hope we are getting this. There is nothing about any self respecting false teacher that will tell us in flashing neon lights Bad, Liar, Greedy, Don't trust him.

No everything he says will be smooth and polished. It will be appealing and sensible. These people will be impressive and respected. They may even write best selling books. They will appeal to flesh. And they will tell just enough truth to get you to believe that it is all true.

Now, who will fall for this?

The simple. This word is often used in a good sense. The word means unmixed, as in no bad mixed in with the good. Free from guile. But in this sense I think we are to regard it as people who have no proper caution, no proper suspicion of one's motives or message. No true discernment, or even the idea that discernment might be needed. This would be like the people who get on the plane without a thought that the plane might crash.

I think a synonym might be idealistic, unquestioningly trusting, trusting souls.

Christ told his disciples to be wise as serpents, simple as doves. Well these people get the simple as doves part right but they miss the wise part.

I grew up in my home church with a man who tended to be simple. I remember with amazement how all of his Sunday school lessons, no matter what their text, would always find their way back to the lesson that we should not smoke drink or chew. I respected this man for his sincerity but learned nothing at all about scripture from him. After I went to college I heard something that was very disturbing to me.

A man came into the church, essentially attempting to judiaze the church. He was trying to get the church to do exactly the thing that Paul warned the Galatians that they should never do. But this man took my Sunday school teacher aside and did exactly what our text is talking about. He filled his head with plausible ideas. And after all, they were coming from scripture. And it appealed to my friend's pride to be a corrective force in the church. So this man became a voice for this usurper who was trying to weasel his way into the congregation.

Well fortunately the leadership of the church learned what was going on and put a stop to it. My teacher came around. But my point is, that is what happens when you are simple. That is what happens when you don't allow the scriptures to tell you what it means. That is what happens when you don't fill your mind with God's word and compare scripture with scripture until it makes sense to you. We cannot afford to idealistic and unquestioningly trusting. We need to take the Bereans as our model.

Acts 17:10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (NKJV)

Do you see how the Bereans avoided being simple? They were more than eager to listen. And what they heard sounded very good to them. They welcomed it. They ate it up. But they didn't end there. They didn't blindly trust. No. Not at all. Every day they would take what they heard and they would do detective work in God's word to see if it was true or not. That is the remedy to being simple. And that is the remedy to being suckered by smooth talking false teachers.

19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf;

Paul again commends these Romans. He tells them that they have a very good reputation. That is a reflection that they have **not given in** to the false teachers. One of the things about false teachers is that the fruit of their ministry will be to get people to quit trusting in the gospel and to quit obeying what God says.

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (NKJV)

2 Peter 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have* a heart trained in covetous practices, *and are* accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray,

18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. (NKJV)

So we see that the effect of false teachers is to make their students like they are. The Romans were just the opposite. So Paul can say

Therefore I am glad on your behalf

Then Paul goes on to reveal his heart.

but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.

Here is this simple word again. This passage reflects closely what Jesus told his disciples. We need to be more than just simple. We need to be wise, discerning in determining those things that are good. But we don't need to be experienced in what is evil in order to be wise. We should be un-mixed regarding evil. We should allow none of it to live in us. We should not cater to its growth or welcome its entry. We should remain as free as we can be from its pollutants. That, in itself, would be enough of an application for today. How can I remain simple-unmixed, unpolluted regarding evil? What changes in my life should be made to keep evil from mixing into my life?

20 And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. (NKJV)

Isn't this great news as we come to the end of our text this morning. The God of peace, the God we have been learning about in Romans, the God who brings us the peace **with** God and the peace **of** God is going to do something.

God is going to crush Satan, just like he promised in the garden of Eden. The son will crush the serpents head. God will do this thing in such a way that Satan will be crushed under the feet of God's children. And this will not take a long time. In fact, it will happen swiftly. When time is over, when the last person has come to Christ, God will end this existence as we know it. And Satan will be crushed. He will no longer be a force in God's creation.

Isn't that a wonderful thing to know? Often the most important truths can be said in the simplest of terms. In this case we can rejoice and praise God for this wonderful fact.

In the end- WE WIN.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Motives are wrong- money sex or power

Philippians 3:18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. (NKJV)

Jude 1:10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. 12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; 13 raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. (NKJV)

2 Timothy 3:6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was. (NKJV)

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. (NKJV)

Their results are destructive

[2 Cor. 11:13-15](#)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

Positive reason to reject false teacher- current obedience- you have what they are pretending to give.

[Matt. 10:16](#)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

[Rom. 12:9](#)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

[Phil. 4:8](#)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

[Col. 3:16](#)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

Soon-speedily