

Romans 16:17–20

Avoiding Causers of Division or Sin

Monday, July 15, 2024 ▪ Read Romans 16:17–20

Questions from the Scripture text: How does v17 begin? What does the apostle call them? What does he command them to do? What two things do the people whom they are to note cause? To what are these two things contrary? Once they've noted the nature of these divisions and offenses, what are they to do? Whom do those who are such claim to serve (v18)? But what do they actually serve? And what else do they deceive, of whom? By what two types of speech? What has become known to whom (v19)? How does the apostle feel about this? In what does he want them to be wise? In what does he want them to be simple? Who will do what, to whom, when (v20)? What does the apostle pray/pronounce upon them? How does he conclude?

Must Christians welcome all? Romans 16:17–20 prepares us for the midweek sermon in the prayer meeting. In these four verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **we are to note and to shun causers of division and stumbling**.

On the heels of the greetings in v3–16, the apostle commands avoiding certain professing “Christians” (v17). Who and why?

Two of the main applications of chapters 12–15 have been that they welcome and serve one another in the church, and that they especially do so with a view toward helping one another stand as holy before the Lord. Against the welcome and mutual service are “divisions.” Against helping one another in holiness are “offenses,” a word meaning causing others to fall or stumble. These are perennial problems in the visible church: those who wish to divide congregations that have Christ in common, and those who enable others' sin.

These are theological problems, because they are “contrary to the doctrine” of this letter (v17). And they are spiritual problems, because they expose someone as actually serving themselves, even if they claim to serve Christ (v18). The poetic image of “their own belly” reminds us how grotesque this is.

These are also infectious problems. Such people do not appear grotesque like the image. Rather, they present as smooth and flattering (v18). Those who are not wise in goodness can easily be taken in to think that these divisions are good (orderly?), or that permissiveness of sin is good (“gracious” “gospel-centered”).

Even those whose “obedience has become known to all” are susceptible to these subtle and deadly errors (v19). And especially those of standing in the faith are targets for the spread of such error. We are not surprised, when v20 reveals who is behind the effort to spread such things in the church: Satan himself! But it is not our responsibility to crush the devil. Rather, we resist him with wisdom in goodness (studying, meditating upon, and assimilating such things as the letter to the Romans!), and by being simple about evil (not being taken in by it, and not falling into wicked cunning in opposition to it). Duty is ours. Events are God's. He will crush Satan. And even our duty will only be done by the grace of Christ!

Over what sorts of things do Christians wrongly divide? In what ways do people cause others in the church to stumble into sin? How can you take note of these things? Whom should you be avoiding?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for the good doctrine of Romans. By this doctrine, give us to be wise in goodness. Please help us to observe how divisions are caused and how sin is accommodated. By the grace of Christ, give us to avoid these things until You crush Satan and under our feet. We thank You that we know that You will in Christ, through whom we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP197 “Christian Unity” or TPH534 “Fill Thou My Life, O Lord, My God”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Romans 16 verses 17-20. These are God's words. Now, I urge you Brethren note those who cause divisions and defenses. Contrary to the doctrine, which you learned and avoid them. 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.

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. And the God of Peace will crush Satan. Under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with you.

So, for the reading of gods inspired and And they're interpret. We might have thought as we were coming through. The greetings that the intense. Theology and especially application portion of the letter had come to a close then suddenly in verse 17, the Apostle begins. Now I urge you Brethren It's a similar beginning to chapter 12 when he is starting the densest application portion.

Of the letter. So, there's something extremely important here, he calls our attention to something. And the main point in. Verse 17 is to note something in order to avoid it and really, to avoid to note certain people and to avoid them. This means that in a Biblical and faithful.

There will be some form of what the world will call shunning. And they call it ironically to shame. Those who follow scripture. In avoiding certain types of people. Those who are to be noted in order to be avoided. Are those who cause divisions and offenses. This means. observe carefully.

Those who are dividing the church, the church is to be one in which we take Delight each of us in one another And there are some who do not take Delight in. in one another and especially in the Gathering of the church together. Love and joy and especially, of course, in the worship of God and also in service together, And when he says note, he's not just saying figure out which ones they are.

He's saying see how this happens. Observe What is the reasoning by? Which what are the priorities? by which Their Delight is not. The Saints. So that they are glad. To have one another in the church. But not only who caused divisions, but also. Who. Offenses. Who scandalize who cause others to stumble.

Now he gives us a clue as we observe how this happens in the church and observe the people who do it and How they come to do it, that it is going to be quote, contrary to the doctrine. Which you learned? And so already, if you are. Um,

And so already, if you see, A division being caused and it's a doctrinal division. Than those who are holding to the doctrine of. The gospel that has been taught throughout the Book of Romans, or any of its components. And are not the ones who are causing the division. It's the ones who hold a different Doctrine or who insist the doctrine is not that important.

That itself is a doctrinal position and a very bad one. You know, someone can say someone May not say well, I believe that you shouldn't be too. Specific and rigorous in your Doctrine. Oh, really. Do you specifically? And rigorously believe that? Because that's a Doctrine. Okay, so they don't even see that they are stating for themselves a Doctrine.

When they say things like Doctrine, divides, what a weird doctrinal statement that is. Okay. but divisions are contrary to the doctrine, which we learned, because we learned That we're Under wrath because of our sin and Adam, we all need the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be our righteousness before.

God, we all need the death of Jesus Christ. To be the propitiation for our sins. We all need the grace of the Holy

Give us. Life. Objects of Mercy. So that we can even be brought to Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We all need The grace of the Holy Spirit to be at work in us applying Christ to us. If we're going to be Sanctified, From whatever our background is. We all have the same needs and we all need to come to the same end.

And so division in the church that is along any other lines. As contrary to the doctrine, in which we have learned. But then causing a brother to stumble. Whether it's in the manner of disobeying chapter six, and teaching. or holding to the idea that God's law isn't important or Believers.

Shouldn't try hard to be holy because, you know, Grace is what's going to make you holy so You should just, you know, go ahead and slouch into your sin. And then, the grace will increase. You know, this kind of antinomian thinking, searches. continuing to multiply That teach this kind of this kind of rubbish.

I just learned of another one. That is calling itself, reformed. it's got Westminster Escondido California. Minister. somehow it's baptistic. He's got a very famous podcast. And he's started. so-called reformed Baptist Church. In Spring Hill. But he's antinomian. He teaches that, you shouldn't teach imperatives you shouldn't Press Believers for Holiness, you shouldn't teach Believers to.

examine themselves. This is what is described here. As offenses. Scandalizings, leading Christians into sin. Another way of leading Christians into. Is skipping the teaching them part. Remember what we saw in chapter 14 and chapter 15. Where the believer who is weak, who doesn't yet understand in his conscience?

He thinks particular things are wrong. Now he's incorrect but if he does them, he's going to be sinning against conscience. And so, Just assert yourself over your brother, or to insist upon enjoying your Liberty. In a way that pressures your brother. to do the same is to scandalize him.

To bring him into a fence. That too, is contrary to the doctrine. Which the Apostle has taught in which verse 17 presumes that we have learned. So there are those who cause divisions in the church. And then, There are those who in a United. Offense scandalize. the brother helped the brother.

into Both both of these things are contrary to the doctrine, which the Apostle has taught in this letter. And so he says note them. And avoid them. Don't be with them. Because these sorts of Errors. Infectious. She says, for those who are such do, not serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly, Now, this is a Poetic expression where you use a part for the whole.

they serve their own belly, they serve their own reputation. They they want others to think highly of them, they serve their own self-esteem, they want to feel wiser than others in the church or Kinder than others in the church. You know, the grace people, they call themselves or the unity people.

They Call themselves. Or whatever it is. But, They are not serving the lord Christ. They are serving themselves. If they're causing division in the church or leading Christians to sin, Whatever else they think. They might think that they are serving the Lord Christ, they certainly will claim that they are serving the Lord Christ.

But, really, they are serving themselves and the Poetry here, the poetic expression using the part for the And he says, they serve their own belly is to give you a grotesque picture of, you know, the monstrous stuffing his face disgustingly. and saying, That is the spiritual and Theological equivalent of that.

That presents itself. as if it's being, you know, on the one hand, those who cause divisions can present themselves as being, you know, very careful, but they're not being careful for the doctrine that is taught in this letter. And they're not being careful for the conduct that is taught in this letter.

Another thing that is making the rounds right now in the churches, not that you guys would necessarily be exposed to it, but maybe Some of those you talk to at church might I definitely know of some people at church who are exposed to it? is kinism is back.

Under the name of Christian nationalism. We believe in biblical, Christian nationalism, All Nations are obligated to be Christian. Every nation is obligated to confess Christ, and bow to him. So, we believe in the fact that there are nations and we believe that they are supposed to be Christian. but Lately.

Christian nationalism has become in some circles, a theory. Of race and culture. And that you shouldn't mix races and cultures because some races are more Christian than others in some cultures. Are more Christian than others and that latter can be true to some extent. But they mean like ethnic cultures and that mixing them is necessarily unchristian.

So you have two things that are going by the same name. but one of them is Causing divisions contrary to the doctrine, which you have learned. even not just causing divisions but the scandalizing. Rather than persisting with the weak and loving with the weak and loving the week and helping the week.

Supposing, you do have these strong church. and the weak churches, even if they work quote unquote, because of their culture. Who would be abandoning the weak to their own? to their own churches. Which violates both. of the things that we are to be watching for in verse 17.

But there are well-meaning Christians. Who. The smooth and flat smooth words and flattering speech. So, the Apostle gives a very gross and ugly picture. They serve their own belly, not the Lord Christ. Why does he have to say that? Because the people who teach these errors, Say that they're serving the Lord Christ and The words are smooth.

They fit. It's not obvious at first. How great and wicked these errors are and they're flattering. It makes you feel like you are. You know, would be right to to follow them and would be doing, right? So, by smooth words and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the simple, Verse 18 says,

He's not saying that the people who get taken in by these divisions and by these That scandalizings, its antinomianism. Or causing people. To sin against conscience without instructing their conscience. He's, he's not saying that they're not sinning but he's putting them in the category of the woman rather than the category of Adam.

They deceive the hearts of the simple. The simple are actually convinced by these false teachings. That what they are pursuing and doing is right. And they too are brought into Serving their own belly. Rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is why the Apostle says note. And avoid.

It takes study. It takes careful thinking. And then, As you identify. What's going on? You don't mess with them. You. take them in as your close friends. that you are going to try to bring along. you don't Join. their private chat groups and spend hours a day.

talking with them. No, he says no. And avoid. Now verse 19 when he's heading out note and avoid four and he talks about how bad it is and how deceptive it is. The next four in verse 19. Maybe a little bit surprising for your obedience. Has become known to all.

Therefore, I am glad on your half on your behalf, but I want you to be wise So what's he saying here? Is that even those who? Are faithful and obedient are susceptible. To

such errors. Second, especially those Who are faithful and obedient are targeted by such errors. Why are they targeted?

Well, it's not just Because people out there who are convinced that they are right to create divisions and cause these offenses create that their right to create divisions and that their right to Make it easier for believers to sin. There are lots of people out there who think that they're right about these things.

It's not just that they want to. Get faithful churches to come over to their way of things. They feel very Justified in attacking. Those who Care much about Holiness. And those who think that. The church should have people from all Races together and that the strong should bear with and help the weak.

And And so forth, but it's not just the people who are involved. Because the very next thing he's going to say in verse 20 is and the God of Peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. So there's a principle in verse 19 and 20 here. That is implied and that is or there's a reality that that is implied in verses 19 and 20 and that is That if the church is faithful and their obedience is known to all, they become especially a target of the devil.

That Satan targets us churches. And one of the primary ways that he targets, those churches is the same as the primary way in the garden through deception. He convinces them by false Doctrine that they are serving the Lord Christ. By dividing the church. He convinces them through false Doctrine that they are serving the Lord Christ.

Making it easier for others to sin. This is a satanic attack. And so there is watch and pray that you enter not into temptation by the Lord Jesus. But there's also Watch and avoid note and avoid In Romans 16 17. By the spirit of Jesus, Through the Apostle. Of Jesus.

Zoe says, I want you to be wise in. What is good? This is why he wrote the book of Romans the letter to the Romans. it is full of Rich, wonderful accurate. Precise distinguishing discriminating theology. So that we may be wise. And what is good? Goodness, takes wisdom, understanding study.

You know, those who say, well, I don't want to study theology. I think we should just love You have to be wise in order to be good. It takes theology. To discern. What is loving and what isn't loving? So it says, I want you to be wise in what is good and simple.

Concerning evil. And this means a couple of things. One, It means unex. Inexperienced in evil. Doesn't want them to have to learn. Through the pain of having fallen into the evil that it's evil. It's okay. Not to know what? It's like to be Wicked. Sometimes and especially among the those who are Wickedly experienced will take a sneering.

Despising. Tone disposition, even words. Towards those who are innocent and Just do not understand the evil because, They have not experienced it and don't care to and don't care to come near it. The impulsa says he wants. Be simple concerning evil. But also, He wants them to take a simple clear forthright approach with those who are evil.

That they would not be. cunning and manipulative. But just note. And avoid. That's very straightforward. It's very forthright. So, note and avoid he is glad for them. That their obedience is known to all and he wants them. to increase in their wisdom to increase in their knowledge that they may do, what is good?

And he wants them to be able. by this theological training to observe note. And to avoid. And they don't have to worry. Because, He doesn't say and you will crush Satan under your feet shortly. He says, and the God of Peace. We'll crush Satan under your feet shortly.

So he teaches us, what we need to believe. He commands us, what we need to do. This is what God does in the Holy Scripture scriptures principally. Teach what man is to believe concerning God. And what Duty God is required of, man. And it is not actually upon us.

To produce the right outcomes. Now, those who pretty caused these divisions. You know, they may think that they are preserving the culture. Preserving the pure. Christianity. their little enclaves and get it. It's not your job.

Preserve outcomes are not our job. Duty is ours. Events are gods. Even those who are antinomian. Think that they are. Helping people feel better, and the reason that this will this will actually lead them to being Holier By not feeling that they have to be holy so that they that they won't have.

anxiety. Over, you know, whether they are saved or whether they are being obedient or whatever. We take too much upon ourselves. When we try to reason from outcome, you reason from what the Lord says to do, what the Lord says to believe. And do you trust him?

And this is something. that we know.

The Lord has given us to do and we can leave unto the Lord. What he himself, has said that he will do. The God of Peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly and not only will God make the outcome. Correct. But of course, for our part, For the right, believing for the right practicing.

In this case, for being able to note those who cause divisions and offenses, and Wisely to understand. what it means to avoid them. For all of these things, we have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the not just blessing. For us who deserve curse.

But strength for us, we have only weakness. The grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ will be with us. So God himself. Guarantees and brings about the outcome. But even for our part, It is by the grace of Christ. That we believe and we practice that we follow and heed.

What the scripture says. And, This brings us to The first almond here. Truly, the Lord the grace of our Lord Jesus will be with us. And, It does seem applicationally. That this concluding application is one of the primary concerns. Of the letter to the Romans. So may the Lord help us.

To be welcoming to other believers. To the same. Doctrine, of Righteousness with God by Grace alone, through faith alone. In Christ Alone. May the Lord help us to be welcoming to one another and to help one another in Holiness. As these are. One of the primary concerns. Of this letter.

Then one spray.

Our gracious Gardener Heavenly Father, we pray that you Make us wise. And what is good and simple. And what is evil? Don't let us be self-deceiving. Don't let us be. Deceived by others and especially O Lord. Don't let us be those who end up even deceiving others. Grant that we would not be those.

Who caused division? Or lead others into sin. grant that we would be able to observe. how this is happening? And, To. Those who Are bringing it about. We thank you that we may leave the outcome entirely into your care. Knowing that you will crush Satan under our feet shortly.

So that we may without Anxiety. Entrust the outcome entirely to you. Do come and help us. We pray by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But his life and goodness and strength in Grant that we would be enabled to heed your word. For we ask these things in his name.

Amen.