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Matters of Urgency!  
Romans 16:17-20

INTRO: Paul says that we are to mark some folks and avoid them. Why does Paul give this urgent warning? Friends, it is because not everyone who names the name of Jesus is a Christian. Not every preacher is a preacher of truth. In our day, there are many false teachers and preachers who are leading folks astray. It is doubtful that false doctrine has been as readily accepted as it is in our time.

The greatest religious movement of our hour is the ecumenical movement, a movement that embraces all kinds of falseism. The cry is to get together no matter what the cost, no matter what we have to give up doctrinally.

Paul emphatically instructs the Roman believers to, "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them"!

To the Apostle Paul, keeping doctrine pure was a matter of urgency!

I. VS 17a, AN APPEAL THAT IS URGENT

A. "Now I beseech you, brethren...."

1. Paul strongly urges the Roman saints to keep an eye on divisive folks.
2. He urges them to stay clear of such people.
3. He beseeches them to stay in the deep channel and not go aground.  
Just as a ship channel is marked by buoys, the channel of the true child of God is marked by Bible doctrine.

B. Paul appeals to these saints to hold to the true faith. To let go of the truth will lead to shipwreck (I Tim 1:18-20).

II. VS. 17b, A PROBLEM THAT IS SERIOUS

A. The serious problem that Paul speaks of must be dealt with in a firm manner. He says, "Mark them" which cause divisions...."

1. "Mark them."
  - a) "Watch out for people whose purpose it is to disturb... harmony and to create divisions" (Hendriksen 510).
  - b) We are to be on our guard. Bible truth is a guard against doctrinal error.
  - c) We are to mark, Greek *skopeo*, which is to "keep our eye on" those who are causing trouble.
    - (1) Some are disruptive because of immaturity.
    - (2) Others are disruptive and divisive because of a desire for personal power.

- (3) The folks spoken of here are disruptive doctrinally.
  2. We are to mark false teachers because of what they can do to individual believers and to a church.
    - a) They can hinder a believer's spiritual progress by getting him bogged down in error.
    - b) False teachers hinder a church by shifting its focus away from the doctrines once delivered to the saints, to man-made teachings.
  3. In verse 16, Paul tells the saints at Rome to, "Salute one another with a holy kiss." Now, he warns them to mark and avoid those who destruct the teaching of truth. Balance is always in vogue. Truth out of balance leads to heresy.
- B. Those who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" are to be marked and avoided.
  1. Every church is in danger of being harmed by those who are always negative and critical. II Timothy 2:23 tells us to avoid foolish and ignorant questions that cause fights. We are to do this but that is not the thrust of what Paul is talking about here.
  2. We are to watch out for those who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to doctrine..." Paul's concern here is with doctrinal truth.
    - a) There are many false doctrines that are destructive. Some of them are:
      - (1) Sacerdotalism+ this doctrine teaches that salvation is in the church.
      - (2) Works salvation+ the teaching that we must work our way to heaven.
      - (3) Baptismal regeneration+ saying that without baptism you cannot go to heaven.
    - b) We must reject those teachings that are contrary to Bible truth and accept the Bible as our only doctrinal standard. The Bible teaches:
      - (1) Salvation is of the Lord+ Acts 16:30b-31, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved....'"
      - (2) Salvation is by grace through faith not of works (Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-9).
      - (3) Only those who are saved are candidates for baptism. Baptism comes after salvation (Acts 2:41).
    - c) Certainly, we are to mark and avoid the cults.
      - (1) The Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Christ is the Son of God. They call Him "a son of God." Nor do they believe He is the second person of the Godhead.
      - (2) The Mormons believe Christ to be the brother of Lucifer. They believe He was a polygamist that He was secretly married to Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and Martha of Bethany.

- (3) Other examples could be given for there are many cults in the world today.
  - (4) Listen closely to the wise words of John Phillips: “The way to detect error is to lay the subversive teaching alongside the straightedge of divine truth+‘the doctrine which ye have learned’” (271).
- C. “Avoid them.” This means to turn away from them.
- 1. Turn away from false teachers because they seek to destroy the flock (Acts 20:27-32).
  - 2. Be on guard because false teachers often wear sheep’s clothing concealing the fact they are wolves (Matt 7:15-16).

### III. VS 18, A WARNING THAT IS SOLEMN

- A. The troublemakers Paul talks about in verse 17 are folks who serve themselves not the Lord Jesus. In recent years, we have seen the kingdom builders, men who used the name of Christ to build kingdoms for themselves.
- B. The true believer is a bond slave of Jesus Christ; these false prophets that Paul is dealing with are slaves to the flesh, slaves to their own appetites.
  - 1. False teachers are enemies of the cross (Phil 3:18-19).
  - 2. False teachers are consumed by and driven by, “self-interest and self-gratification+sometimes for fame, sometimes for power over their followers, always for financial gain...” (MacArthur 374).
- C. False prophets are smooth talkers. They know how to flatter and to deceive the hearts of immature believers.

### IV. VS 19, A TESTIMONY THAT IS SOLID

- A. In the first part of this verse, Paul commends the churches at Rome for their faithfulness. These believers were known for their, “simple wholehearted faith and love...” (Newell 558).
- B. The second part of this verse is what Griffith Thomas calls “an earnest desire” of Paul.
  - 1. He desired that they be “wise unto that which is good.”
    - a) To be wise unto that which is good, we must study the Word of God (II Tim 3:16).
    - b) The wise take heed to God’s Word (Psalm 119:9).
    - c) The wise memorize the Word of God (Psalm 119:11).
    - d) The wise think upon the principles of God’s Word (Phil 4:8).
  - 2. Paul desired that the Roman believer be “simple concerning evil.”
    - a) “Simple,” unmixed+used of wine or metals: Pure, free from guile, like a little child.
    - b) We need to be innocent concerning evil. We do not have to be, and we should not be, worldly wise. Yes, we need to be wise in godliness, but simple as to things of the world.

### V. VS 20, A SOON TO BE DEFEATED SATAN

- A. It is not that they will defeat Satan, but that God will:
  - 1. Satan will be crushed in complete fulfillment of Gen 3:15.
  - 2. Believers are co-heirs and co-conquerors (Rom 8:17; Rev 13,14).
  - 3. Our redemption is closer than ever. Satan will soon be defeated (II Thes 2:8).
  
- B. Paul says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."
  - 1. Grace- God's unmerited favor.
  - 2. Note that it says, "Our Lord Jesus Christ..."
    - a) Jesus means Savior. He is our Savior when we believe.
    - b) Can you say that He is your Savior?

CONCLUSION: We need to be wise as serpents and as harmless as doves as we await our soon coming King.