

## Beware of Those Who Divide (16:17-19)

16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 16:18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 16:19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

### Discernment

- After telling the Romans to “receive” Phoebe (16:1,2), sending his greetings to Roman believers (16:3-15), and commanding that their fellowship be holy (16:16), Paul now gives a contrasting warning: don’t receive or welcome everybody.
- This proceeds logically from Paul’s command that they “greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16). The fellowship of believers is to be holy, but because of the reality of spiritual opposition in the world, believers must be discerning.
  - Jesus warned that there will be “tares among the wheat” (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43), and said that “it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come” (Matthew 18:6,7).
  - Paul speaks of “false brethren” (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4), and of “false apostles, deceitful workers” who disguise “themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13).
  - False confessors of Christ and false teachers are a promised reality (1 Timothy 4:1).
  - How are we to know and discern?
- The determining factor is not how they appear, how personable, how popular, or how appealing their words are. We are discern by “the teaching which you learned” (16:17). Hopefully we have been taught

true doctrine, and now believe, confess, and live that truth out in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

### The Nature of the False

- “...those who cause dissensions...” See also 1 Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 5:20.
- “...and hindrances [σκάνδαλα, “stumbling blocks”] contrary to the teaching which you learned...” Remember the tactic of the serpent: question God’s Word (Genesis 3:1). He hasn’t changed because people still fall for it. False teachers question the truth of God’s Word, twist it, or make it difficult to obey it.
- “...such men are slaves...of their own appetites...” In Philippians 3:18,19 Paul calls them “enemies of the cross of Christ...whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” They don’t teach the way of the cross (denial of self), but teach Jesus as a way to receive good and pleasurable things on earth.
- “...by their smooth and flattery speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” Unless we are “shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16), and unless we are “examining the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11), we will fall prey to lies.

### Famous Fruit

- When Paul speaks of the Romans’ “obedience,” make sure you understand how obedience fits in the Christian life.
  - The Romans weren’t saved by their obedience. No one is. They were saved by faith.
  - True faith, however, produces fruit: obedience to God’s Word.
- 16:19 begins with the conjunction “for” (γὰρ), connecting Paul’s joy over their obedience to his warning about false brethren and false teachers. In other words, the

**Obedience  
is the fruit,  
not the  
root, of  
faith!**

<sup>1</sup> READ Romans 6:17.

reason these false people will come into the fellowship is because of the Roman congregation’s famous faithfulness to Jesus. It is spiritual warfare, satanic in origin.

## The Promise Kept (16:20)

16:20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

### The God of Peace

- Paul gave a benediction from “*the God of peace*” in 15:33. Remember that He is only a God of peace to those who trust Jesus alone for their right standing before Him (5:1).

### The Adversary

- This is the first time Paul mentions the devil/the adversary in this letter to the Romans.<sup>2</sup>
- This is an allusion to the first Gospel promise in the Bible - Genesis 3:15. These false brethren and false teachers are the “*seed*” of the serpent, and their defeat is promised.
- We are to trust their defeat because the serpent was defeated in Jesus’ earthly ministry (Luke 10:17-20).<sup>3</sup> This ministry is now carried on in believers as we spread the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The “armor of God” given to us for spiritual warfare

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<sup>2</sup> “*Satan*” is not a proper name, but a Hebrew word/title meaning “adversary” (שָׂטָן).

<sup>3</sup> Compare Satan’s “*fall from heaven like lightning*” with Revelation 12:7-9. Compare the authority “*to tread on serpents and scorpions*” with Ezekiel 2:1-7.

<sup>4</sup> I believe the time between Christ’s first and second coming is the “millennium” of Revelation 20:1-6. The devil is bound (20:1-3) from rallying all the nations against the Church (20:7-9) so that the Gospel may spread through all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

ends with prayer for the spread of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:10-20)!

- The defeat was guaranteed by Jesus’ death on the cross (John 12:31; Hebrews 2:14,15; 1 John 3:8). Because of our Spirit-union with Christ by faith, His victory over the adversary is our victory.
- Defeat of the “seed” of the serpent in local congregations is a step toward the final defeat of the serpent.
- When you read Paul’s promise in 16:20, keep Revelation 1-3 in mind; the glorified Jesus is active in His congregations, even in bringing judgment on the false.

## Greetings from Corinth (16:21-23)

16:21 *Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.*

16:22 *I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.*

16:23 *Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.*

- We get eight more names (the last in Romans) in this section. While 16:1,2 gave us the name of the individual bringing the letter (Phoebe), and 16:3-16 gave us Paul’s greetings to believers in Rome, this section (16:21-23) is the greetings of those with Paul in Corinth sent to the believers in Rome.

## Grace (16:24)

16:24 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

- Just a few verses ago we read a similar benediction: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you*” (16:20b).
- We live in faithfulness and victory only by the grace that is ours in Christ. God “*made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:5,6,8,).