

47. To God be the glory forever

April 5, 2009

Finally, after the 46 studies of the Book of Romans, we came to the last portion of this larger-than-life-Book that taught us so much from the beginning. You all remember that the theme of the Book is “the Righteousness of God.”

We’ve learned about depravity of humanity, grace of God, justification by faith, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, security of the believers in Christ in the first eight chapters.

Then we moved into the area concerning Israel. Apostle Paul expertly weaved divine sovereignty and human will as well as past, present and the future of the nation Israel throughout chapter 9 through 11.

Paul knew through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration that we need practical applications concerning Christian life in social, civil and personal areas, so he powerfully illustrated and explained them to us from chapter 12 to the end of chapter 15.

But he was not quite done yet. In this last chapter, he penned greetings, a warning and exhortation, plus prayer to the Lord our God. As he concludes this awesome letter to the believers in Rome and all of us, he wants us to know that we have one purpose in our lives – one purpose only – to God be the glory forever and ever.

A. A WARNING

Romans 16:17-19a Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause 1) divisions and 2) 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 3) deceive the hearts of the simple. 19a For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf;

If you’ve been attending churches for sometime, either you have experienced or seen false teachers and their doctrines coming across to the churches you attended or at your home door step. They all come in different shapes and styles. They all talk sincerely and it seems that they really care about your spiritual well beings. They want you to understand their new winds of doctrines or their own cultic doctrines.

Or you might even have had an opportunity to see those who joined the church you attended as church members. Once they get your trust, they start to cause divisions within the ranks of the believers in the church and the end result is a church split.

Our church has experienced a few church splits as well. Those people caused much difficulties in the midst of the congregation. Even though they claimed that they were the ones who were led by the Holy Spirit, the outcome was anything but that. If they were truly trying to glorify God and following the Lord’s direction, they are the ones who should stand now and we are the ones no longer existing, right? But we are still here, studying and following the Word of God and they are no more.

As it is now, unbiblical teachers were constantly trying to infiltrate the early church. Paul himself fought them many times, attacking their heresies vigorously in the churches at Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica. He certainly didn’t want to leave Rome vulnerable either.

These people employ three methods to accomplish what they want to do:

1) Divisions

The Greek word for this 'divisions' is "dichostasia". Obviously, the false teachers were causing the believers within the church to form competing factions. They were dividing the church and draining its power and witness and furthermore, they were causing the believers to be at each other's throat.

It worked effectively in the past and Satan and his henchmen still use this divide-and-conquer tactic. God hates it.

Proverbs 6:16-19 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

You don't want to be in the list of God's Seven Most Wanted. I don't want to see your mug shot in the Heaven's Post Office wall.

2) Offenses

I really like the definition of the Greek word "skandalon" for this 'offense'. It is defined as a trap, snare that causes one to stumble or fall. How vivid and descriptive! Of course, we get an English word 'scandal'. The false teachers, then, were setting traps for the believers, hoping to make them stumble in their faith.

The most frequent method these false teachers use is putting doubt in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, full humanity and total deity in the hearts of the young and weak believers. Once this central core issue is shaken in their hearts, their moral standard can erode and they will be trapped in immorality faster than anyone can imagine.

3) Deception

I have not seen one false teacher who does not have charisma, smooth words and flattering speech. Unfortunately, many Christians were falling prey to them because they do not know the Word of God.

Flattery is something people do in front of you without their sincere hearts in it. But gossip is something they do behind your back with their hateful hearts in it.

B. THE MOTIVES OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

Romans 16:18a For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly

These false teachers are not making their moves to young and weak believers because they care about them. It is nothing more than satisfying their own selfish desires. They don't care about anyone else except themselves. I really like the rendition of NKJV here – 'their own belly'. Plain and simple.

Let's remember this: Truth without unity leads to pride; unity without truth leads to a departure from the true Gospel itself. Each of these must be guarded against.

C. THE ORIGIN OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

Romans 16:19b-24 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. 21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. 22 I,

Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

So where do these false teachers come from? None other than satan himself.

America's great theologian of the 18th century Jonathan Edwards was right to call satan the greatest blockhead the world has ever known. For although satan is exceedingly knowledgeable and cunning, he was also supremely stupid to suppose that he could out-think the allwise God or overpower the Almighty.

Yes, satan is powerful, but he is also a conquered enemy who is doing everything he can to drag as many souls as with himself to hell.

D. BE WISE IN WHAT IS GOOD, AND SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL

I'd like you all to pay attention on this simple verse 19:

be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil

The first thing we have to comprehend is the definition of 'good'. Certainly, good in this context includes the idea of sound doctrine, such as Paul has been teaching throughout Romans. But it's bigger and more personal than that. A helpful place to start learning what good is all about is Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

What would these virtues do? They build up. They support. They encourage. They reflect the character and heart of the God who reaches out to us in love and saves. What they don't do is harm.

Evil, on the other hand, promises pleasure and fun and freedom for a short time, but its real goal is to cause destruction. Broken trust, shattered minds and bodies, violence, deceit, exploitation, shame, heartache, humiliation, loneliness, fear – all kinds of pains are the legacies of evil. Paul is telling us to be ignorant of these things.

If your heart and mind are right with the Lord, in many situations when your coworkers or relatives make those off-color jokes you may not get them. So you have a blank facial expression and your co-workers would look at you and say, "You didn't get that, did you?" It is a completely OK not to get those things. Just be ignorant in the things of this carnal world. You don't have to experience them to relate with them. You don't have to step into raw sewage to know that it is dirty.

What apostle Paul said in v19 reminds me of another Bible verse:

Matthew 10:16b Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

It means that we are not to be deceived, and yet not to be deceivers.

Grace clearly was one of Paul's favorite themes. He probably never got over the wonder of it in his own life, that great merciful kindness of God. And he desires nothing more than to explain and extend God's grace to those for whom Christ died.

Because of grace, God gives us what we don't deserve, what we can never earn, and what we will never be able to repay.

Because of grace, God's favor rests on us without any merit on our part. Because of grace, God sees His Son in us and is satisfied with our lives.

There's no uptight rule-keeping, no strangling obligations, no condemnation, no guilt. It's all because of God's grace toward us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

E. TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Romans 16:25-27 Now to Him who is able to establish you 1) according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, 2) according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, 3) according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

Without our God we have nothing to show off when it comes to stability. We are prone to confusion and misunderstanding. We are limited in our own capabilities. Our own selfishness makes more stumbling blocks in our path. Our own effort of holiness and righteousness would be full of holes.

But our God is able to strengthen and stabilize us that we can stand firm in Him in these three ways:

1) According to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ – incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, we are justified, sanctified and glorified in our God.

2) According to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began

What revelation? What mystery is Paul talking about? He means this as the whole plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Don't ever think that the devil knew this redemption plan of Jesus through the cross. It was the best kept secret in the universe although it was written all over the Scripture. If the devil knew it, he would do anything to stop Jesus from being crucified on the cross. He thought as long as he killed Jesus, there wouldn't be any redemption and salvation for mankind.

3) According to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith

Knowing the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not sanctify us. We need to be obedient through our faith to be established in our God.

Only one God is true, only one God exists: the Triune God – God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All others are pretenders and idols, whether they're made out of stone, money, power, or the person we see in the mirror.

This one God is also wiser beyond our meager comprehension, no matter how educated and have a bunch of initials behind our names. His wisdom is infinite, before time and after it, above the greatest heights and beneath the lowest depths.

God's highest wisdom and expression of greatest favor toward us is found in Jesus Christ. Through Christ, every single human being can be reconciled to God. Not even satan can stop that, except one person – that particular individual. We are able to draw near to the holy, majestic, righteous and loving God.

It is no wonder we want to declare, "To God be the glory forever and ever."

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Be wise in what is good and simple concerning evil.

We are not to be deceived, and yet not to be deceivers.

2) We will never experience victory until we personally accept His grace in our lives.

It is only by God's grace that He called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

It is only by God's grace that He defeats the enemy of our souls and grants us peace.