

Romans

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish

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Romans 16:17-20



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Vss. 17-18

- Paul gives a benediction to the letter at the end of Ch.15: "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.". But yet we have all of Ch. 16, a full 27 verses! Is it that he decided to add all the personal greetings before handing the letter over to Phoebe to deliver or is it that his secretary to whom he is dictating the letter points out that there is still one more page of parchment left? So Paul adds 15 verses of instruction and greetings and THEN the final benediction in 16:16. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." But wait! There's more parchment left! So before the Apostle does finally close, he offers a word of warning: watch out for those who would destroy the church from the inside out.
- As we have seen in both Paul and John's letters, there were traveling preachers of various types and some could cause great damage.
- In John the primary concern were those preaching Gnosticism, where the message was that Jesus was not really human but merely a spirit, for the body and all material things are evil and Jesus could not be evil so He could not be human. The next step then was that whatever you did with your body was inconsequential. Your body was nothing. It was only your spirit that mattered for only your spirit would be saved. Obviously if this were true Jesus could not have been crucified as it is impossible to nail a spirit to a cross. And if Jesus wasn't crucified, He didn't die for our sins leaving us still in our sins. And if Jesus was a spirit and didn't die, then He wasn't raised and if He was not bodily raised, then we will not be raised. And we're just fooling ourselves if we think that God is uninterested in what we do with our bodies. It's easy to see how such people might be a bit disruptive!
- While Paul was concerned about the Gnostics, he was more concerned about the Judaizers, who would push the church back to the Law of Moses and legalism. In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul writes, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the **grace** of Christ for a different gospel, which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ...You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?" (3:1-2).
- And then there were those Paul would later write of to the Philippians while imprisoned in Rome. In Philippians 1, Paul points out that he has heard that some are taking advantage of his

imprisonment to preach as they will without worry of him correcting them. “Some to be sure are preaching Christ even from envy and strife...out of selfish ambition...” (1:15-17).

- Such men Paul says to the Romans are not slaves of Christ, but are slaves to “their own appetites”, whatever those appetites may be. These are the ones who will claim that they have done great things in the name of Jesus, but the Lord will say, “Depart from Me, for I never knew you”. The Greek word the NASB translates for “smooth speech” is **chrestologos**. The Greeks used it to speak of “a man who speaks well and who acts ill.” He is the kind of man who sounds good, using a lot of pious words, but is a bad influence, who leads the faithful astray, not by direct attack, but by subtlety, who pretends to serve Christ, but in reality is destroying the faith (Barclay).

Vss. 19-20

- With a word of warning comes a word of praise. Paul tells them that word of their faithful obedience to Christ and fidelity to the Truth of Christ as laid down by the apostles is known and respected wherever the churches of Christ may be. This was a cause of great joy to Paul, for here was a church that was not his own, that he had not taught, in a city where it had to be tough to be Christian, and yet their faithfulness in thought and deed stood out as an example to the whole world.
- With praise also comes a word of encouragement: “be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil”. There is a single Greek word that we translate as “innocent in what is evil”. **Akeraios** was a common word used to describe metal that was pure, without a hidden alloy; or milk or wine that was not watered down. So don’t be just **mostly** free from evil but **completely** free.
- Paul sums up these thoughts by essentially saying, “Stay true to the faith of the Apostles in thought and deed and never allow any evil to creep into you individually or as a church and you will see God do great things. He will literally crush Satan under your feet”. For when Paul says the “God of peace” will do this, he is speaking of the God who acts, the God of power, the God of victory. Too often people seek peace by merely avoiding conflict rather than by confronting the issue. This passive peace, this submissive peace is not from “the God of peace”, for His peace has overcome the world, triumphed over the grave, and has thrown Satan down.
- And then yet again, Paul closes with a benediction: “The grace of our Lord be with you!” But wait! There’s still a little more parchment left!