

Romans 16:1-27—The Importance Of Strong Friendships, And, Identify And Avoid Divisive People

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Introduction

Previously we learned that Paul literally begged the saints in Rome to join him in prayer. The christian life is not a one man show. We are not islands. We need each other for prayer support, encouragement, and accountability.

Ephesians 4:11-16 NLT

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. **As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.**

In Romans chapter 16, Paul commends and greets his dear friends, the ones who labour alongside him and also suffer persecution for the sake of the gospel. He then also warns his readers about divisive persons. Just like it is so important to choose godly friends who will build us up in our faith, so it is imperative that we avoid those who are divisive and cause offences. Why? Because they will pull us down individually, and tear us apart corporately. How? Because bad company corrupts good character. We will see that Paul's warning was needed, because those who cause division are like wolves in sheep's clothing, they come across as an angel of light, but in reality are a minister or servant of satan himself. They may or may not be saved, but because they are walking in the darkness, blinded by pride, and out of fellowship with God, they are a tool of the enemy—*“For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites and base desires, and by ingratiating and flattering speech, they beguile the hearts of the unsuspecting and simpleminded [people]”* (Romans 16:18 AMP).

Outline

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2. Paul greets his friends in Rome (vs 3-16)
3. What is an apostle? (v 7)
4. The command to avoid divisive persons (vs 17-20)
5. Be wise in what is good, and simple (uncontaminated) concerning evil (v 19)
6. Greetings from Paul's friends to those in Rome (vs 21-24)
7. Paul's benediction—his final thoughts (vs 25-27)

Romans 16:1-27 NKJV

Paul commends Phoebe

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Greeting Roman Saints

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who laboured much for us. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have laboured in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

Avoid Divisive Persons

¹⁷ Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and 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 deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Greetings from Paul's Friends

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.

Benediction

²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶ but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, 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.

1. Paul commends Phoebe

Romans 16:1-2 NKJV

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

v 1-2 **I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you:** It is very likely that Phoebe was the one who delivered Paul's letter to the church in Rome. These letters of commendation were needed as there were many deceivers and false prophets who sought to take advantage of Christian hospitality. It was hard to know who to trust. As it is today, there were many who promoted themselves and/or a false gospel, seeking to fleece the flock.

2 John 10-11 NLT

If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement. ¹¹ **Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.**

This leads to an important application—before accepting people and allowing them to serve in the church, it is wise to do a background check on them. For example, ask the pastor or leadership at their previous church some questions to find out what they were like. Were there any issues? Were they divisive? Did they leave on good terms? What did they believe? Were they humble and willingly serving others?

v 1 **Cenchrea:** **Cenchrea** was the seaport of the city of Corinth. Corinth was the main city in southern Greece, and a centre for idol worship, especially the pagan goddess "Diana".

v 1 **Phoebe:** **Phoebe** is another name for "Diana", the feminine form of the pagan god "Apollo", the name of Corinth's most famous deity. This indicates that she was most likely a gentile who had converted to Christ, as Jewish parents wouldn't call their children after the name of a pagan goddess.

v 1 **Servant:** "The word translated "servant" is literally *diakonos*, or "deaconess", which indicates that women were in positions of ministry in the early church. According to the writings of the church fathers, deaconesses visited the sick, helped young women grow in the Lord, and tended the poor. How we need those who have a heart to be servants like Phoebe—those who say, "Our call is to tend those who are sick, poor, and young in the Lord." (Jon Courson)

v 2 **She has been a helper [someone who supports or assists others] of many and of myself also:** Phoebe was someone who supported others by coming alongside them in their work by offering practical help and nurturing them. The Greek word translated **helper** "linguistically speaks of what a mother does as she tenderly nourishes her baby through breastfeeding" (Jon Courson). She wasn't a leader in the church, but she was a servant, and she made herself very useful, and so became a blessing and encouragement to many others. This practical help is one way of demonstrating the love that Christ desires us to have for each other so that the world may know that we are His disciples (see John 13:35). This is essential for the spread of the gospel.

You don't need to be a woman to do this role. Back in the early days of the Calvary Chapel Church, Pastor Romain came alongside Pastor Chuck Smith. He didn't seek the limelight, but just worked in the background, coming alongside Chuck so that Chuck could fulfil his ministry. It's so important to recognise that behind every successful leader or ministry there are always **helpers** who work tirelessly to make things happen. Like a successful family, a successful Christian ministry is always a team effort.

2. Paul greets his friends in Rome

Romans 16:3-16 NKJV

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who laboured much for us. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have laboured in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

v 3-4 **Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life:** Paul had a long history of working together with this godly husband and wife team. Paul was introduced to them in Corinth, and they were also tentmakers like Paul was (this is where we get the term "tentmaker" to mean someone who support themselves financially as they serve in the ministry). We do not know when **Priscilla and Aquila risked their own necks** for Paul, but it does show that they were faithful friends.

v 5 **Likewise greet the church that is in their house:** This is how it was back then. There were no large church buildings, the church met in small groups in different people's homes.

v 5-16 **My beloved... who laboured much... my countrymen and fellow prisoners... my beloved in the Lord... approved in Christ... who are in the Lord... who have laboured in the Lord... who laboured much in the Lord... chosen in the Lord... and his mother and mine:** It is beautiful to see all the different terms of endearment and commendation that Paul uses when describing his friends and fellow workers in the ministry—more than 28 people. Paul had a network of close friends who he worked with at various times and had fond memories of. This is the fruit of true fellowship in Christ, which is only achieved as we have the right attitude towards each other (patient and accommodating), and we work towards the same goal (seeking first the kingdom of God).

"So there are distinctions and degrees in honour among believers, and these are graduated by the scale of service done. It is an honour to labor for Christ, it is a still greater honour to labor much. If, then, any, in joining the Christian church, desire place or position, honour or respect, the way to it is this—labor, and labor much." (Spurgeon)

3. What is an apostle?

v 7 **Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles:** There is much confusion and false teaching regarding what an apostle is, especially with the NAR (New Apostolic Reformation) movement becoming more and more popular. Jon Courson gives a good summary of the three different categories of apostles. “Bible students, this is an important verse because it is a key to understanding the apostolic ministry. There are those who say there are only eleven apostles—twelve if Paul is included in the position vacated by Judas—and that there are no apostles in the church today.

On one hand, I agree with them. On the other hand, I disagree. That is, if they’re speaking of apostles that were appointed by Jesus Christ, I agree that there were only twelve, for such apostles had to have seen Jesus visibly. They had to have a firsthand knowledge of His ministry; and their ministries had to be confirmed with observable signs and wonders that validated their apostolic ministry.

But there are two other categories of apostles, each linked with the other two Persons of the Trinity. The Father sent out one Apostle: Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1). The Spirit sent out many apostles—Andronicus, Junia, Titus, Timothy, Barnabas, and a host of others called apostles in Scripture (Acts 13:2). Therefore, in my opinion, the apostolic ministry continues today in those who are sent out by the Spirit, those who feel called in their hearts to go forth. Missionaries could be more accurately called apostles. The problem with the term “apostle” arises only from a misunderstanding of the word.”

4. The command to avoid divisive persons

Romans 16:17-20 NKJV

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and 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 deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Romans 16:17-20 NLT

And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. ¹⁸ Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people. ¹⁹ But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Romans 16:17-20 AMP

I appeal to you, brethren, to be on your guard concerning those who create dissensions and difficulties and cause divisions, in opposition to the doctrine (the teaching) which you have been taught. [I warn you to turn aside from them, to] avoid them.

¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites and base desires, and by ingratiating and flattering speech, they beguile the hearts of the unsuspecting and simpleminded [people].

¹⁹ For while your loyalty and obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I would have you well versed and wise as to what is good and innocent and guileless as to what is evil. ²⁰ And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah) be with you.

“Not everyone was working with Paul for the spreading of the Gospel. There were some who, for selfish reasons, were dividing the churches by teaching false doctrine. These people were probably the same Judaisers who had given Paul trouble in other churches (see Phil. 3:17–21). Instead of preaching the truth, these men spread their own religious propaganda, using deceit and clever speeches. We have the same problem today, and Christians must beware of false teachers. They come to your front door with magazines, books, and tapes, trying to convince you that they are teaching the truth. *Paul gives two instructions: mark them (identify them), and avoid them.*

It is a matter of obedience to the Lord and testimony to others. The issue is not making or keeping friends, but pleasing the Lord and maintaining a consistent testimony.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

v 17 **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine [teaching] which you learned, and avoid them:** Paul has spent much time showing us how to have unity in the church (by having the right attitude towards each other and working towards the same goal of seeking first the kingdom of God). Now he appeals to believers to avoid a very serious source of disunity—divisive people.

Why look for, name, and avoid those who cause divisions?

v 17 **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses... and avoid them:** The Greek word translated “**note**” means to: actively look out for, examine, inspect, be concerned about, and pay careful attention to. Why would Paul say to be on the lookout for those who cause division? *Because it’s always better to defuse the bomb than deal with the awful mess after the bomb has exploded*—after people’s lives have been ruined by deep hurts that are so difficult to forgive and so they never come back to church, after churches have already split, after friendships have been extinguished, after ministries have been destroyed, and after God’s name has been blasphemed and mocked in the world. If there is a bomb around, then people need to know so that they can avoid it. It’s the same principle behind letting your family, friends, and community know that a certain person is a pedophile or a drug dealer—you want them to avoid that person so that they don’t get hurt. In the same way, the church family needs to be warned about the divisive person so that they can avoid them and not get hurt.

Examples of different kinds of divisions

v 17 **Cause divisions:** The Greek word translated “**division**” means: sedition, dissension, discord, and disunion. If satan can’t cause us to fight amongst ourselves, then he will send in spies, wolves in sheep’s clothing, devils disguised as an “angels of light”, who will seek to divide us and so destroy us. There are many ways that satan tries to divide and conquer the church. Three common ways to look out for are:

1. **A false gospel**—e.g. the Jehovah’s witnesses, Mormons, Scientologists, etc with their different versions of Jesus and their different gospels

Many sincere seekers have been led astray by false churches or cults. The cults prey on new believers. They pry them away from the true church, and keep them isolated in their own satanic organisation—rendering them unproductive and unfruitful for the kingdom of God.

2. **Hidden and selfish motives**—having their own agenda and using the church for their own gain

I’ve heard of insurance salesmen who use friendships made in a church setting to get more business—they will then move churches when they have exhausted contacts in their current church. Then there are the unbelievers who use the church to snag an unsuspecting spouse, someone who they know, because they are a Christian, will be faithful to them, and will serve them, even though it won’t be reciprocated.

3. **The Narcissist**—*the individual who is so poisoned or overtaken by pride that they can't submit to God or genuinely care for other people; they invent their own fake reality in which they are better than everyone else, and then spend their life justifying themselves and trying to convince others that their fake reality (who they think they are, and what they think about others) is actually real*

Remember that the biblical definition of pride is simply to have a false or unrealistic understanding of who you really are. Also, pride is the root cause of all division.

Romans 12:3 AMP

For by the grace (unmerited favour of God) given to me I warn everyone among you not to estimate and think of himself more highly than he ought [not to have an exaggerated opinion of his own importance], but to rate his ability with sober judgment, each according to the degree of faith apportioned by God to him.

Romans 12:3 NLT

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

Proverbs 13:10 NKJV

By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Proverbs 21:24 NKJV

A proud and haughty man—"Scoffer" is his name; he acts with arrogant pride.

I think that the most dangerous, the most insidious individual, is the proud and manipulative person, often called a narcissist. They will do anything to feel accepted and be liked by others. They want people to think well of them. They want to be in control. They want things done their way. They manipulate by gaslighting (a slow form of brainwashing that makes a victim question their reality). They want others to believe that their fake version of reality is actually real. They will serve in church as long as it suits their purposes, but will passive-aggressively go against and try to usurp what they don't agree with, whether it be a teaching, an idea, or a person they don't like. They are so dangerous because they are so well hidden, so hard to detect, and once a person is under their spell, believing and living in their fake reality, then it's really hard to escape the emotional bondage and be truly free again. As the Scriptures say, they, **"by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"**.

However, things are different, they get much more ugly, when the narcissist doesn't get their way, when the narcissist can no longer manipulate us to get what they want. This happens when we establish healthy boundaries and so choose to protect ourselves from their manipulative ways. *We protect ourselves by refusing to engage or argue with them, by completely separating ourselves from them.* When this happens the narcissist changes their tactic from manipulation to intimidation. Their subtle passive-aggressive behaviour turns into outright hostility. They will cause havoc and strife, using emotional blackmail, gossip, and slander to try to force us to acquiesce to them—if we just agree with and submit to them, then it will all stop. This is the narcissist's true colours coming out. *It should be no surprise that they never loved us.* This is what Mohammad did to the Christians; first he tried to get them to join him peaceably, but when they refused, he slaughtered them if they didn't convert to Islam, and the slaughter continues to this very day.

But we don't need to bow down to the proud, controlling, and manipulative narcissist. We don't need to be afraid of this kind of person who first manipulates and then intimidates. *By our faith in God we can and must overcome, we must set ourselves free like a bird escaping a trap or snare. Why? Because these toxic relationships will quench the Spirit more quickly than any other sin. Why? Because we will, usually unconsciously, live in fear of these prideful emotional manipulators, and we are therefore controlled by them—we have submitted ourselves to them and we therefore do what pleases them. It is painfully obvious that we cannot also be submitted to God at the same time—we have become man pleasers instead of God pleasers, and our relationship with God stagnates and we will never mature as a Christian.*

Another negative effect of staying in contact with a narcissist and allowing ourselves to be manipulated by them, is that *our relationships with other people are also negatively influenced.* We get sucked into the narcissist's fake world view and start to see both ourselves and other people according to the narcissist's own fake version of reality. Of course, this sabotages our relationships with each other, because we view each other as the narcissist does, and not as we really are—pride has caused the relationships to be no longer real or genuine—real trust and vulnerability is lost. Remember that the narcissist's goal is to remain in control, with everyone depending on them and thinking that they are right and good.

However, the worst effect of staying in contact with a narcissist, is that we become like the narcissist. The Bible gives clear warnings:

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NKJV

“Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits [character].” ³⁴ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

1 Corinthians 5:2, 5-7 NKJV

² And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you... ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump ⁷ Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

So here is the truth according to Scripture. To continue to interact with the Narcissist, thinking that we can influence them, or change them, or win an argument with them, *is emotional and spiritual suicide.* The narcissist is extremely proud, and the Bible *promises* that we will become like whoever we spend time with—*“Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits [character].”*” By us allowing them to continue to influence us by staying in contact with them, *we will become more like them—they will not become like us—that's not the way it works.* It's like when a Christian marries a nonbeliever, almost all of the time the unbeliever has more influence on the believer—because it's so much easier to pull someone off the chair than to lift someone up onto the chair (the higher moral ground)—*evil company will always corrupt good character.*

Therefore, by choosing to not completely cut off, reject, and avoid the divisive narcissist as the Scriptures command, we start a vicious and destructive cycle; the more time we spend with the proud narcissist, the more we become like the proud narcissist. Sadly, as our pride increases, so does our level of self-deception, and so we are further deceived into thinking that we will not be influenced by them and so spend even more time with them—the boundaries we may have put into place will fail and we will continue to be more and more influenced and deceived by their false reality.

It's just like what happens with any kind of sin, a little compromise always leads to greater compromise. Remember Warren W. Wiersbe's comment on these verses: "Paul gives two instructions: mark them (identify them), and avoid them. It is a matter of obedience to the Lord and testimony to others. The issue is not making or keeping friends, but pleasing the Lord and maintaining a consistent testimony."

These prideful, toxic, narcissistic relationships are everywhere, in families, at workplaces, in sports teams, and of course, in churches. Again, Paul says that these people have no business in the church until they repent. When they are allowed to manipulate, they will play people off against each other and try to get rid of those who they feel threatened by, those they feel that they can't control. There will be a passive-aggressive undercurrent that will poison the koinonia fellowship that God desires us to enjoy. That's why Paul says to **note** them, to look out for them and warn others about them, so that they will not be able to destroy the church family. Paul the pastor is protecting his flock, and therefore so must I.

v 18 **By smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple:** "Simple" doesn't mean dumb, but rather unsuspecting, innocent, or naive. We must *wake up* and recognise that we are in a spiritual battle. We must be aware of satan's tactics which will cause us to remain immature, impure, and ineffective in the kingdom of God.

A brief survey of other verses that instruct us on how to deal with divisive persons

Romans 16:17-20 is not the only place in the Scripture that deals with divisive people. However, all the instructions are the same—warn them, and then ask them to leave.

Titus 3:10-11 NKJV

Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Titus 3:10-11 NLT

If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. **After that, have nothing more to do with them.** ¹¹ For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them.

Matthew 18:17 NLT

If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, **treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.**

1 Corinthians 1:10 NLT

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 NKJV

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

1 Corinthians 5:11 NKJV

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

2 John 10 NKJV

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

1 Timothy 1:19-20 NLT

Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.²⁰ Hymenaeus and Alexander are two examples. I threw them out and handed them over to Satan so they might learn not to blaspheme God.

5. Be wise in what is good, and simple (uncontaminated) concerning evil

v 19 **Be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil:** Jon Courson has a very important application.

“Why shouldn’t we follow cultural trends? Why shouldn’t we be those who monitor activities, music, or movies so that we might know what’s happening?

Take careful note: In the very beginning God warned His people that they were in danger of becoming ensnared by the same gods and influences that damned the Canaanites before them. How? By inquiring after their gods, saying, “How did these nations worship? What were they doing? What was their mind-set and perspective? I need to be informed about it. I need to keep up with it. I need to be tuned in to it” (Deuteronomy 12:29, 30).

“Even though you are in the land,” God said to His people, “even though the Canaanites are wiped out, don’t research their idolatry, for it will ensnare you. You’ll become interested in it. You’ll become intrigued by it. Even though your motives might have been okay initially—watch out. There are powerful forces at work, demonic entities behind those idols, videos, movies, magazines, and books. Stay away.”

In other words, the Word of God in Deuteronomy is the same as it is in Romans: “Be naive concerning evil.” In trying to keep current, too many people in the church have been caught up in the current of carnality, carried down the river and wiped out. Why? Because they failed to heed the warnings so clearly given in the Word.

“The idols of the nations are silver and gold,” the psalmist declared (Psalm 135:15). So, too, in order to sell their CD, movie, or book, the idols on MTV and in Hollywood today will be seductive, immoral, or outrageous. They’ll do whatever it takes to get silver and gold.

The tragedy is that the one who makes the idol becomes like the idol (Psalm 135:18). Truly, what we fix our eyes on is what we become. Fix your eyes on the culture and you will mirror the culture.”

6. Greetings from Paul’s friends to those in Rome

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.**

Tertius wrote as Paul dictated. This was Paul’s common practice when writing all of his epistles or letters. Paul most likely had a problem with his eyes, and so found it hard to write (see Galatians 4:15). Gaius was extremely well known for his exceptional hospitality.

7. Paul's benediction—his final thoughts

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶ but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, 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.

v 25 **Now to Him who is able to establish you:** We must remember that everything we are and everything we achieve is all by God and for God. Unity in the church is something that God has already given us, but we must maintain it by walking according to His power and grace.

v 25 **According to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ:** This is how we are established in our faith, by coming to understand the truth concerning Christ and His salvation found the Scriptures.

“Christians are established by the truth, which explains why Paul wrote this letter: to explain God’s plan of salvation to Christians so they would be established, and so they would share the truth with the lost. After all, we cannot really share with others something we do not have ourselves.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

v 25 **According to the revelation of the mystery:** In Romans 9-11 and Ephesians 3, Paul defines the mystery as God’s program of uniting believing Jews and gentiles into one body, the church. God is calling **all nations to obedience to the faith** (v 26).

v 27 **To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever:** “In this conclusion Paul reflects on the wisdom of God’s plan in the gospel and the fact that such wisdom is beyond man. God had a plan no man would come up with, but the wisdom and glory of the plan is evident.” (David Guzik)

Summary and conclusion

“What a remarkable chapter! In it Paul greeted at least twenty-six people by name, as well as two unnamed saints; and he also greeted several churches that were meeting in homes. He closed with greetings from nine believers who were with him in Corinth when he wrote the letter. What is the significance of this? It shows that Paul was a friend maker as well as a soul winner. He did not try to live an isolated life; he had friends in the Lord, and he appreciated them. They were a help to him personally and to his ministry. In my own reading of Christian biography, I have discovered that the servants whom God has used the most were people who could make friends. They multiplied themselves in the lives of their friends and associates in the ministry. While there may be a place for the secluded saint who lives alone with God, it is my conviction that most of us need each other. We are sheep, and sheep flock together.” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

What we learned today though, is that we must be very careful when choosing our friends. We will become like those we choose to be around, for better or worse. Choosing the wrong friends can have *catastrophic consequences*.

It is my prayer that through studying the gospel as taught in the letter to the Romans, that we will become more grounded and stable in our faith, and more able and more excited to share our faith with others. May we never stop reading, studying, and obeying the precious gospel so well laid out in book of Romans, and may our faith in God, and our love for God continue to grow. Amen.