

Handling Trouble in the Church # 55

Romans 16: 17-20

As I considered this passage, I regrettably had to admit that I couldn't think of a church that I knew anything about that hadn't faced trouble at some point in their history. Really this should come as no surprise to us. We know churches are made up of imperfect people who make bad decisions and behave in ways contrary to the Lord's plan and design for the church. Trouble comes in various forms, but most often within the church it results from those who seek to satisfy the flesh rather than submitting to the will of God. Many times those who cause trouble have a problem with the way the church is being operated and seek to force her to conform to their way of thinking or their agenda.

Troublemakers within the church are not a difficulty the church just recently began to deal with. In fact, as long as the church has existed, troublemakers have made their presence known. Jesus knew false teachers would come, seeking to divide and destroy the church. [Matt.7:15 – Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.](#) When departing Ephesus, Paul warned the church to prepare for trouble ahead. [Acts 20:29-30 – For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.](#) ^[30] [Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.](#) The church is forced to deal with adversity from without at times, but all too frequently, the trouble comes from within.

Since trouble is something we know we will face, we must be prepared when it comes. The church must know how to handle this trying situations. Let's examine the [instructions](#) Paul left the church as we consider: [Handling Trouble in the Church.](#)

I. The Actions of False Teachers (17-18) – As Paul offers instructions for dealing with those who cause trouble and spread false doctrine, he begins with their actions. He reveals:

A. They are Divisive (17) – [Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.](#) A common tactic false teachers use to create turmoil within the church is division regarding doctrinal issues. They prey on weak, immature believers in an effort to persuade their minds and put them at odds with the accepted doctrine of the church. The word divisions means “*to splinter or cause dissension.*” False teachers seek to divide in order to conquer. They know a house divided will not stand. The word offenses speaks of “*laying a trap or snare in the path of another in order to cause them to stumble.*” False teachers and troublemakers never seek the good or unity of the church. They

strive to create divisions and separate believers into different factions. (I am always cautious around those who are constantly pulling individuals to the side and whispering after services.)

B. They are Deceptive (18) – *For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.* Paul possessed enough wisdom to discern their true motives, but many could not accurately discern their desires. He knew they sought to be perceived as genuine and sincere in their pursuit of the Lord, but they only sought to serve their own lusts and desires. These were well versed in what to say and how they presented themselves before others. They had developed a rhetoric that sounded genuine and sincere, but it was only for show. In reality, they had no desire for the church to prosper or serve the Lord; their priority was to promote their agenda and satisfy their desires.

- Paul knew these troublemakers targeted weak believers. They sought to influence the simple. Now, this doesn't speak of their intellectual level, but their spiritual maturity. It speaks of those who are "*innocent and harmless, distrusting of no one.*" They seek to influence those who are yet immature in the faith and easily persuaded by false doctrine. They seek those who appear isolated and vulnerable.

II. The Answer for False Teachers (17) – *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* While Paul described the actions of troublemaking false teachers, he also provided the solution for dealing with them. He spoke of:

A. Our Attention (17) – As we encounter those who create divisions and offences within the church, we are to mark them. This has the idea of "*keeping an eye on, to observe, contemplate, or scrutinize.*" We are called to be aware of those who cause divisions and promote false doctrine, keeping an eye on their activity and influence. This is not being judgmental or harsh; it is being biblical and concerned for the wellbeing of the church. I assure you, if I become aware of one seeking to create division or promote false doctrine, I will pay close attention to them. We cannot turn a deaf ear or blind eye to those who seek to destroy the church.

B. Our Avoidance (17) – Paul also declares we are to avoid those who seek division and offence within the church. That is a strong word calling for strong action, but it is necessary. Often those who seek trouble within the church are enabled by well-meaning people. Some are intrigued by the perceived knowledge of the false teacher and feel as if they have a deeper understanding of Scripture. Other false teachers are very charismatic and personable. False doctrine in dangerous

and not to be embraced or encouraged in any way. Avoid those who teach doctrines contrary to Scripture. You will not be behaving in an unfriendly way, but in accordance with the Word. These thrive on attention and the ability to manipulate others. Avoid them! [2 Tim.3:5 – Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away](#). I am willing to pray for anyone, but I will not fellowship with those who seek division through teaching false doctrine.

III. The Antidote for False Teachers (19) – Paul offers further wisdom to prepare us when approached by false teachers. His wisdom will also help restore those deceived by false teachers. In order to overcome and remain strong, Paul speaks of:

A. Obedience to the Word (19a) – [For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf](#): Although Paul had yet to visit the church in Rome, he was convinced of their doctrinal purity and obedience to the Word they had received. The church was founded upon the Gospel and rooted in the Word. Paul knew continued study and obedience to the Word would prevent being deceived by those who taught doctrines contrary to the Word.

- This truth has not changed and it never will. The best defense against false teaching is to know the truth. You don't have to worry about studying what others believe or teach. Study to know the Word of God and you will be able to recognize false teaching. Living in obedience to the Word will prevent one from embracing the lusts of the flesh, which is usually at the heart of false teaching. Those who work for the Treasury Department do not study counterfeits; they study the genuine article and are able to easily recognize a counterfeit.

B. Allegiance to the Way (19b) – [but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil](#). Paul was concerned some among the church had learned truth, being wise to that which was good, and yet being naive and even deceived by the evil false teaching of others. In order to overcome false teachers and false doctrines, one must be aware of their approach. As with those who produce any counterfeit, it always bears resemblance to the original. False teachers are no different. Their teaching will always be truth sprinkled with error. They are wise in their deceits. As they begin to infiltrate and indoctrinate unsuspecting churches, they begin very subtly. The majority of their teaching will be biblically accurate, with a small measure of untruth. As they draw the unaware in closer, they carefully mix in more false doctrine. Over time they have changed the truth into a lie and many have received it as truth.

- We must maintain our allegiance to the Truth of the Word, refuting any teaching that is contrary to the context of Scripture! Every believer should seek doctrinal purity in life, while living accordingly. There is no room for error when it comes to the Truth of the Word.

IV. The Annihilation of False Teachers (20) – Finally Paul speaks of how the Lord will deal with those who refuse the Truth and seek to spread deceit and false doctrine. Consider:

A. The Defeat of the Enemy (20a) – *And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.* While the church was forced to deal with much adversity, even from among within, God was not unaware. The enemy, and those who seek to promote his agenda, may enjoy a season of influence, but God will have the final say. At the end of the age of grace, God will fully and finally deal with Satan. He possesses great influence and power in our day, being the god of this world, but his days are numbered. He was defeated as Christ died for our sin and rose triumphant in death, and at the return of Christ he will be bound and cast into the lake of fire for eternity.

- Realizing his time is short, the devil is increasing his attacks in our modern day. *Rev.12:12 – Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* Our struggles will intensify as we get closer to the Lord's return, but we are more than conquerors in Christ. He has already secured victory for the believer!

B. The Deliverance of the Saints (20b) – *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* While facing much adversity, some may have been tempted to abandon their faith, but Paul sought to encourage them through the grace of God. He knew from experience that grace was sufficient for whatever one must face, and he wanted the church to embrace that as well.

- We have no way of knowing how bad society will get or the difficulties we will have to endure, but we can rest assured in the grace of our Lord. He will never leave nor forsake us. We are secure in Him. We may lay aside this body of flesh in death, but we are promised eternal life in Christ. There is nothing I will face in life that can separate me from the love, grace, and provision of the Lord. That provides great peace and strength while facing adversity.

Conclusion: These words were written thousands of years ago and yet they bear eternal truth. The enemy has not changed and those who serve him are using the same tactics to defeat, deceive, and destroy. We must be wise to his approaches and prepared for his attacks. We must know the Word and abide in it if we are to overcome. Christ alone, through the Holy Spirit can equip us to endure. If you need wisdom, Jesus is the source. If you need salvation, Jesus is the Savior. If you need encouragement, Jesus is our strength. Whatever need you have, Jesus is the answer!