

THE MESSENGER'S FINAL WARNING: MARK DIVISIVE PEOPLE ROMANS 16:17–20

Introduction

Divisiveness and evil are always a threat to the local church. The reason can be simply stated: people have problems, even believers. The fact that we live in a corrupt and depraved world means that people become disgruntled, disappointed, unhappy, selfish, sinful and in some cases evil. Even the strongest believers become contaminated with corruption by having to live in the very air of a sinful world. It is because of this that Paul warns the church and its believers: mark divisive people. Watch out for them: be cautious; take note and keep an eye on them, for they are a constant threat to the church.

- I. Mark divisive people and avoid them (vv. 17-18).
- II. Mark what is good and untainted with evil (vv. 19-20).

I. *Romans 16:17–18 Mark Divisive People*

Mark divisive people and avoid them. Note: this warning abruptly cuts into Paul's greeting to the Roman church. Paul is greeting various believers in the church whom he has met on his travels throughout the world. All of a sudden, he interrupts his greeting and issues a severe warning. The abrupt interruption is *not an afterthought*; it is the final exhortation needed by a strong church — an exhortation against an event that is bound to happen: the seeping in of divisive people. A divisive person is a person who...

- grumbles
- complains
- criticizes
- murmurs
- gossips
- is argumentative
- causes strife
- acts out of pride, ambition or selfishness
- is unloving
- teaches a different doctrine

The most effective way for Satan to get a foothold into a strong church is to quietly and insidiously move a divisive person into some teaching or leadership position where he can influence immature believers. Paul knew this, so he left the warning until the end of his letter. It is a warning that must be heeded by a strong church if it is to keep its witness for the Lord.

There are three reasons why a divisive person must be marked and avoided.

1. A divisive person causes division and lays stumbling blocks in the way of growth. Note exactly what is said: a divisive person acts “contrary to the teaching which [believers] have learned.” He causes “divisions and obstacles.”

=> The word “division” (dichostasias) means standing apart, being separate, causing cleavage.

=> The word “obstacles” (skandaia) means laying a stumbling block in someone's way or causing someone to fall.

- a. The divisive person acts “contrary to the teaching you [believers] have learned.” The teaching of God and of Christ is simply stated:

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

Genuine believers have trusted God's Son. They have accepted Christ as their Lord, giving all they are and have to Him; and they do love one another, having committed their lives to carry the teaching of Christ to the world.

However, this is not true with a divisive person. He acts *contrary* to the teaching of God and of Christ. He opposes...

- the Lordship of Christ
- the teaching of Christ
- the love of believers
- the mission of reaching the world with the gospel: the glorious news of life in Christ, life that is both abundant and eternal

- b. Avoid them because of the terrible devastation that a divisive person can do to the strength of a church. The term “keep away” (*ekkline*) means to shun, to turn away from, to remove oneself from. Get away from them and have absolutely nothing to do with them.

- c. Watch the divisive person. The word “watch” (*skopeite*) means to keep one's eye on, to look at, to observe, to focus upon, to contemplate, to scrutinize. Note: it is the divisive person himself who is to be *avoided and turned away* from, not just his sin. We are not to have anything to do with a divisive person...

- for we give the appearance of approving what he is doing.
- for we run the risk of being influenced and stumbling over what he says and does.

Mat 18:7 *“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”*

Mark 9:42 *“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”*

Luke 11:17 *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.”*

1 Cor 10:31-32 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.*

1 Cor 1:10 *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

1 Cor 3:3 *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*

2 Cor 6:3 *We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.*

Phil 1:27 *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*

2. A divisive person does not serve Christ, but his own desires. The word “appetites” (koiliai) means the stomach and its physical appetites. A divisive person is gripped by...
- selfish desires
 - base ambition
 - personal urges
 - physical appetites
 - wanting his own way
 - getting what he wants

Note: Scripture clearly says that divisive persons do not serve Christ. They call themselves *Christians*, but their Lord is not Christ. They are not committed to His honour and glory and mission, but to themselves — to getting and doing what they want. The divisive person is still given over to the things of this, unspiritual, carnal, sensual and secular world.

Phil 3:18-19 *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

3. A divisive person uses flattering speech to deceive. He uses smooth, persuasive and reasonable words to lead people to take sides with him. He talks and acts godly, and he shows interest and concern for those whom he wants to convince. But note what Scripture says: the motive of the divisive person is to deceive. He wants others...
- to think as he thinks
 - to believe as he believes
 - to walk as he walks
 - to live as he lives
 - to follow as he follows
 - to talk as he talks

The result of his divisiveness is tragic: he deceives the naive, that is, the unsuspecting, the innocent, the immature, the carnal, the unspiritual, the newborn believers.

Titus 1:10-11 *For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group [religionists]. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.*

2 Tim 3:5-7 *[Men] Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds*

of evil desires, always learning [the latest philosophy, theology or novelty] but never able to acknowledge the truth.

II. Romans 16:19–20 Strong Church

Mark what is good, and untainted with evil. A strong church, such as the Roman church, must constantly be marking and focusing upon *what is good and untainted with evil*. If a strong church fails to know and do good, it will be penetrated by evil (divisiveness) and it will become a weak church. Therefore, a strong church must always, with the utmost diligence, be looking for what is good and untainted with evil. Three reasons are given for this charge.

1. A strong church such as the Roman church is obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the very reason for its strength: the church has been obedient to the Lord, doing exactly as He commands. The believers have been...

- a. Living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

- b. Ministering to the needs of people even as He ministered.

Mat 20:28 *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

- c. Witnessing to all far and wide, fulfilling His mission.

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

The result of such a dynamic obedience is a strong testimony that is spread among all men. People know where to go when they need help: they know where the obedient believers are who are truly following the Lord.

2. A strong church must be wise to know what is good. Its people must grow more and more in *goodness* — in knowing what is good and what is evil. Believers must be *wise*...

- to *search* for what is good and untainted with evil.
- to *know* what is good and untainted with evil.

The word “innocent” (*akerios*) means unmixed, unadulterated, pure, without any mixture of evil. The idea is that the believers of a strong church must constantly mark, focus and concentrate upon what is good in order to keep the bad out of its fellowship. The way to keep evil out of a church is to focus upon the good. The way to demonstrate spiritual wisdom is to concentrate upon the good; then evil will be recognized for what it is, and it will be rejected.

The point is this: a strong church must not only avoid evil (v. 17); it must not allow evil to penetrate its fellowship. It must not allow a divisive person to stir up the “naive” (unsuspecting) believers of the church. A church must be wise: it must mark and focus upon what is good and untainted with evil. It must be wise enough to spot evil and to stop its penetration into the fellowship.

3. God will soon give victory over Satan. The meaning of “soon” does not mean shortly, but *quickly* or *swiftly*. The idea is *not* that God is coming soon to destroy Satan, but when God acts to deliver His people from evil and divisiveness, Satan will be quickly defeated. His work against God's consecrated people (a strong church) will last only for a moment. The “God of Peace” will restore peace swiftly and quickly to the fellowship of a strong people. But note: the defeat of Satan and divisive persons is conditional. A strong church must do what has been said: mark and focus upon what is good and untainted with evil. God will bless a church that is obedient and concentrating upon Christ and His mission.

Note another fact: God is going to bruise Satan under the *believers' feet*. It is the *feet of the believers* that God uses to bruise Satan. When genuine believers of a strong church do what God says, then God will act to deliver His people from evil and divisiveness.

Luke 10:19 *“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”*

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

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

1 John 4:4 *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ■*

THE MESSENGER'S COMPANIONS

ROMANS 16:21–23

Introduction

It is important for every minister and believer to have close associates who know and are faithful to the Lord. The strength of the associates greatly affects the witness of the minister. This passage gives a glimpse into the lives of a few of Paul's associates.

- I. Timothy: a right-hand man, a fellow worker (v. 21).
- II. Lucius, Jason, Sosipater: relatives who were believers (v. 21).
- III. Tertius: a humble helper (v. 22).
- IV. Gaius: a man of hospitality (v. 23).
- V. Erastus: a civil servant, the city director of public works (v. 23).
- VI. Quartus: a Christian brother (v. 23).

I. Romans 16:21 Timothy, Paul's Right Hand Man

Paul calls Timothy his right hand man, his fellow worker. There is a great deal of information on Timothy throughout the New Testament. There are even two letters which bear his name included in the New Testament. The letters were written to Timothy by Paul himself (1 and 2 Timothy. Also see *Timothy*, Acts 16:1-3; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:18.) Note two facts mentioned about Timothy, facts which should speak to our hearts.

1. His name, Timothy, means *one who honours God*. Both his mother and grandmother were faithful believers who reared Timothy in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Apparently when Timothy was born, his mother had dedicated him to the Lord after the pattern of the Old Testament believers. She gave him his name knowing perfectly well what it meant. Her hope and prayer was that Christ would take her child and use him to *bring honour* to God's name.

Thought 1. What a dynamic example for parents! We should all commit our children to Christ, rearing them in the Scriptures and constantly praying for Christ to use them to bring honour to God's name.

1 Tim 1:5 *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

1 Tim 3:15 *If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

Deu 6:7 *Impress them [God's word] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

Prov 22:6 *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

2. Timothy is called Paul's *fellow worker*. Paul places Timothy on an equal par with himself. Paul sees Timothy's call and ministry as being as important as his own. This says several significant things.
 - a. Timothy's mind — his thoughts, imaginations, concepts, ideas, purposes, plans, concerns — was consumed with the very same things as Paul's mind: Christ and His mission and the reaching and caring for people.

Phil 2:20 *I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.*

2 Cor 10:5 *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Phil 4:8-9 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

- b. Timothy was faithful in ministering right along with other ministers of the gospel, doing exactly what God had called him to do. Note that he was second to Paul, that is, Paul's assistant. However, this did not bother Timothy, for Timothy knew something: it was God, not man, who had called him to be second and to serve as the assistant. Therefore, he was *faithful*, always serving his Lord and helping the chief minister.

1 Cor 4:17 *For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

Phil 1:1 *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:*

Phil 2:22-23 *But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.*

Heb 13:23 *I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

ACTS 16:01–03 TIMOTHY, DISCIPLESHIP

Timothy was just a child when Paul visited Lystra on his first mission (about five or six years before). He was probably somewhere around ten to twelve years old. He was still a young man when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12). All

this means Timothy was somewhere around eighteen years old when Paul met him on his second mission to Lystra.

It is also possible that Paul led Timothy to the Lord on his first mission tour, but it is more probable that Timothy's mother and grandmother led him to the Lord.

The present passage seems to read as though Paul did not know or remember Timothy from his first mission. In either case, his spiritual maturity at this point was strong enough for Paul to challenge him to join his mission corps. The facts of his life seem to be as follows.

Timothy's father was a Greek and an unbeliever, but his mother was a Jew and a believer. Her name was Eunice and his grandmother's name was Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy was not circumcised; hence it would seem that he was educated in Greek ways and customs (Acts 16:3). When Paul met Timothy, Timothy was already a Christian believer with a strong testimony, so strong in fact that Paul arranged for him to become his missionary partner (Acts 16:1f). Timothy's maturity and importance are seen by the word "he" of verse one being changed very rapidly to "they" of verse four. Timothy became a son to Paul (1 Cor. 4:17). He was esteemed so highly and loved so deeply by Paul that Paul said he was the one man whose mind was at one with his own (Phil. 2:19). He was probably chosen by Paul to become Paul's successor (see Phil. 1:1). From this point on, he was seen either ministering with Paul or else being sent out by Paul to minister to certain churches. He was with Paul in Paul's first imprisonment (Col. 1:1; Phile. 1). Apparently, Paul was released from prison and Timothy began to travel with him again (see *1 Timothy*, Introduction, Date). On this journey Paul left him in Ephesus to correct some errors that had arisen, while Paul himself travelled on into Macedonia to visit the churches there. Soon thereafter Paul was arrested and imprisoned in Rome a second time. As soon as possible Timothy joined him (2 Tim. 4:11, 21), but this time Timothy was imprisoned also. However, Timothy was later released (Heb. 13:23), while Paul was either beheaded or released and began a mission tour into Spain. (See *Timothy*, Phil. 2:22-24.) □

II. *Romans 16:21 Lucius, Jason and Sosipater*

These men were apparently relatives of Paul. It should be noted, however, that the word "relatives" is thought by some to mean fellow countrymen. This is unlikely, for Paul often mentions others who are fellow Jews and he does not refer to them as relatives. Apparently, Paul had a family tree just like most of us have: branches that just keep on running out from our aunts and uncles and their children who are our cousins. Just who these men were we cannot be sure, but note what is said in this passage.

1. They were relatives of Paul who had trusted Christ as their Saviour and surrendered to His Lordship. Who was converted first, Paul or his three relatives? We do not know; but this much is known. Genuine believers pray, and they diligently pray for

relatives, believing that it is their responsibility to reach their own families first. For this reason. Paul's family saw quite a few of its members give their lives to Christ (cp. Rom. 16:7).

Mat 5:16 *"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Mat 9:6-7 *"But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home.*

Luke 8:39 *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

John 1:41 *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).*

John 4:53 *Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.*

Acts 16:15 *When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

Acts 16:30-31 *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household."*

1 Tim 5:4 *But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.*

2. They were serving the Lord with Paul. Any person serving with Paul was bound to be committed to Christ and to be fully committed, for if any man has ever been committed to Christ, it was Paul. Without question, these three men had given all they were and had to the Lord. They were bound to be gripped with the needs of masses suffering under the weight of starvation, disease, poverty, sin and death, and with the urgent need to get the gospel of salvation to them. The very fact that they were serving with Paul tells us that this was the heartbeat of their lives.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Mat 20:28 *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

III. *Romans 16:22 Tertius, A Humble Helper*

This believer was a humble helper. Note two significant facts about Tertius.

1. He helped Paul in a most significant but humble way. Apparently he was not a preacher, but he served as the personal secretary to Paul, writing this letter to the Romans for Paul.

Thought 1. The need for dedicated people who are gifted in handling details is desperately needed in the service of Christ! Very little if anything can be done effectively without what may be called the *Service Ministries*. May God stir and arouse men and women to give their lives as Tertius did: to reach out in the *service ministries* of the Lord.

2. He personally knew the Lord and was bold in proclaiming his testimony. Glance at the verse again: "I Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you *in the Lord*" (v. 22). Paul does not send the greeting for Tertius; Tertius takes it upon himself to send his own greeting. He is a fellow believer with the Roman Christians, and he wants to greet them in the name of Christ, proclaiming his own faith and his own ministry in the Lord. Men of the world may consider him and his work as secretary of little importance. But he does not: his faith and ministry are the most important things in the world to him. Therefore, he proclaims that he too is "in the Lord" and that he is the secretary who wrote the letter for Paul.

Thought 1. Just imagine how few letters, books, articles and papers would be written for Christ without the dear saintly servants who labour ever so diligently as the secretaries for God's ministers. Think about all the *service ministries* and how much would never get done without the commitment of God's *detail servants*.

Luke 22:26 "But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves."

Rom 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Rom 12:10-11 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.*

Phil 2:5-7 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

Thought 2. Something we must always remember and proclaim: no work and no service done for God is small. Men may rank work and labour, but God does not. God ranks and judges only faithfulness.

Luke 16:10 *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”*

Luke 19:17 *“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”*

IV. Romans 16:23 Gaius, A Man of Hospitality

This believer was a man of unusual hospitality. Apparently, Gaius was a wealthy man with a home large enough to entertain the whole church and to house God's servants over a long period of time. The point to note is this: he was faithful in using his money, wealth and estate for the Lord.

Mat 6:19-20 *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

Rom 12:13 *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

1 Tim 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Titus 1:8 *Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.*

Heb 13:2 *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

1 Pet 4:9 *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

V. Romans 16:23 Erastus, A Civil Servant

This believer was a civil servant, the city director of public works for the great city of Corinth. This tells us that he was...

- a man highly respected both among believers and the world.
- a man of extreme responsibility who could be greatly trusted to look after his responsibility.
- a man of courage who stood up for his convictions and did not let political office nor friends and associates in high places keep him from confessing Christ.

It is interesting to note that Erastus was apparently called to preach the gospel, and eventually he resigned or was removed from political office. He is seen on a mission tour

with Timothy (Acts 19:22) and is mentioned as still being faithful in the latter months of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:20).

Mat 10:32-33 *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."*

Luke 12:8 *"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God."*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

VI. Romans 16:23 Quartus, A Brother

This believer is very simply called "our brother." This is significant, for it means...

- that he had made a genuine commitment to Christ and that he was serving mankind as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- That he had a brotherly heart and love, helping and standing with other believers as a brother in the Lord.

John 13:34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

John 15:12 *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ■*

THE MESSENGER'S BENEDICTION: GOD IS ABLE TO ESTABLISH YOU

ROMANS 16:25–27

Introduction

God is able to establish the believer. The word “establish” (*sterixai*) means to strengthen, secure, make stable, set fast and make firm. The one thing men long for is to be secure, strong and established firmly in life. God is able to fulfil this longing. God is able to establish and strengthen man and to give him a strong life.

- I. Establish you by the gospel (v. 25).
- II. Establish you by the proclamation of Christ (v. 25).
- III. Establish you by God's revelation of the mystery (vv. 25-26).
- IV. The benediction (v. 27).

I. Romans 16:25 *Spiritual Growth, Stability, Steadfastness*

Believers are established and made strong by the gospel. Note a significant point.

Paul calls the gospel, “my gospel.” He does not mean that he possesses the gospel, or that he is the author and creator of it. He does not mean that he has formulated a man-made gospel that men are to follow. He simply means that he is a preacher of God's gospel, and God uses the gospel which he and other preachers proclaim to strengthen believers. God is the Sovereign Majesty of the universe who possesses the message of the glorious gospel. God is the Author and Creator of the message, not Paul nor any other preacher. But note: Paul and other preachers are ambassadors; they are the representatives of God who carry forth the gospel of God. The preacher of the gospel stands before the world with *God's message*. He has the right and the authority to proclaim the gospel, and the gospel proclaimed comes forth from his voice. In this sense it is his message — his gospel — that God uses to establish and strengthen believers.

2 Cor 5:20 *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

John 17:20 *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” [the word of the gospel given by God]*

Acts 26:16 *‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.’*

Acts 20:32 *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

1 Pet 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

II. Romans 16:25 Proclamation of Jesus Christ

Believers are established and made strong by the proclamation or preaching of Jesus Christ. The preaching of Christ can mean either the message preached by Christ Himself or the message about Christ that is preached by others. Both meanings make sense, and both are certainly true, for the message of salvation preached by Christ and by His followers is the same.

Heb 2:3 How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

John 3:14-15 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 8:51 "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 3:17-18 "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 3:36 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

III. Romans 16:25–26 The Mystery of the Gospel

Believers are established and made strong by God's revelation of the mystery of the gospel. Note three points.

1. The mystery of the gospel had been a secret since the world began. The word "mystery" (*mysterioun*) does not mean something obscure and difficult to understand nor something that has to be searched out and solved by men. It simply means...
 - some truth that was not previously known.
 - some truth that *could not* be discovered by human reason.
 - some truth that had to be *revealed by God* if it was ever to be known.

The gospel could never have been known by man. It is not a creation of man's mind, of his rationalizations, concepts, thoughts and ideas as to how man is to become reconciled to God. Man could never and can never figure out how to become acceptable to God. No man in this physical world could ever penetrate the spiritual world, no matter what some have claimed. Jesus said so:

John 3:13 *"No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man."*

The spiritual world and the message of the spiritual world have always been a mystery, and they would have remained a mystery if God had not acted and revealed the spiritual world and dimension to man.

2. The mystery of the gospel is now revealed by the commandment of God in the prophetic Scriptures. God wants the world to know the gospel; therefore, He has commanded that it be revealed and proclaimed to the world. But note the crucial point: it is revealed by the prophetic Scriptures (dia graphon prophetikon). This is extremely important, for it tells us exactly where we are to find out about God and His message to the world. We do not discover God by natural reasoning: God reveals Himself to us.

Thought 1. There are two questions that desperately need to be studied by everyone.

- 1) Since God has revealed how men are to become acceptable to Him, why do men continue to create their own ideas about how to reach God? Why do men continue to think they will be acceptable to God if they can just do enough good to pacify God? Why do most men continue to think that God will never reject them, that they are not evil enough to be unacceptable to God?
- 2) Since God has revealed the gospel in the prophetic Scriptures, why do men not rush to the Scriptures to find the truth? Why do men not search the Scriptures daily to find out what God has revealed?

Rom 1:2-4 *The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Rom 3:21-22 *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.*

3. The mystery of the gospel is revealed for a purpose: to lead all nations to be obedient to Christ. Very simply, God wants from us what any person wants from others: love and trust. We all want others...
 - to love us and to care about us.
 - to trust us and have confidence in us.

John 6:28-29 *Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

John 15:10 *"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Gal 3:6 *Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Gal 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision [religious ritual] nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

IV. Romans 16:27 Benediction

The benediction is a glorious declaration of praise.

=> God is the God of the gospel; therefore, He is the only wise God. As the only wise God and as the Author of the gospel, He is due praise and glory forever.

=> But note the simple and clear fact that is proclaimed again and again by Romans: God can be approached and praised only through Jesus Christ.

John 4:42 *They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."*

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Acts 4:12 *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

Acts 5:31 *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

1 Tim 1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.*

1 Tim 2:5 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved*

us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Heb 8:6 *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*

Heb 9:15 *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

Heb 12:24 *To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*

1 John 2:1 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

1 John 4:14 *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. ■*