

Sermon Notes on "Watch Out and Be Wise" Romans 16:17-20

- * In his closing remarks (15:14-16:27), Paul addresses another key aspect of his ministry in warning believers about the dangers of false teaching and teachers.
- * The church is called to "fight the good fight of faith" which requires tough love that is willing to recognize, rebuke and renounce what God wants us to reject. And God has a rejection list:
- * Unbelieving sinners will spend eternity in hell (John 3:36; John 8:24)
- * Unrepentant church members will be put out of the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-10)
- * Ungodly false teachers, prophets and apostles are to be turned away from (our text)
- * In verses 17-20, Paul calls the church to three faith-protecting responses:

1. **Be actively discerning (16:17a, 18)**

- * God tells us we are in a battle for truth (2 Cor. 10:3-5) and it requires the willingness and ability to differentiate between truth and error.
- * The greatest threat to the church is deception (2 Cor. 11:1-4, 12-15) and the greatest tool of Satan (the deceiver) is false religion (Rev. 12:9; 13:11-14), so the greatest need of the church is discernment, so Paul calls the church "to keep an eye on" the false teachers and leaders (Rom. 16:17) who prey "on the hearts of the unsuspecting" (16:18)
- * How can we discern these "ravenous wolves"?
- * Check their content (v. 17c: "contrary to the teaching which you learned"): Be a "Berean" believer (Acts 17:11) and watch out for the "doctrine of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1) as they predominantly minutely misrepresent the Person and work of Jesus Christ and the gospel message
- * Check their character (v. 18a: "for such men are slaves...of their own appetites"): These wolves are motivated by self-interest and self-gratification (2 Pet. 2:2-3, 10-11, 14-15, 18; Jude 1:4, 8, 12, 16, 18-19)
- * Check their communication (v. 18b: "by their smooth and flattery speech"): They are very effective communicators who use fleshly allurements (2 Pet. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:6; Titus 1:11) or religious rules (1 Tim. 4:3) or controversies (1 Tim. 6:4) to effectively confuse and deceive their audience (2 Pet 2:2). Their influence "will spread like gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17).

* Check their conduct (v. 17b: "cause dissensions and hindrances"): The ugly fruit of their work produces disunity and division (read an excellent article on 6 Reasons to Avoid Division People (Pastor Scott LaPierre) <https://scottlapierre.org/avoid-divisive-people/> and stumbling blocks that cause deception which God tells us will continue to get "worse" (2 Tim. 3:13).

2. Be **appropriately disassociating (16:17d, 19)**

* God is clear that we must "turn away from them" (v. 17). The believers in Rome were being "obedient" and Paul was rejoicing about this, but he warned them to "be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil" (similar to Jesus-Matt. 10:16) and not be taken advantage of by these wolves.

* There are three ways to deal with "ravenous wolves":

* Indoctrinate yourselves with God's Word (1 John 4:1, 6; 1 Thess. 5:22-22)

* Defend the truth against the lies (Jude 3; Titus 1:9, 13-16) up to a point (Matt. 7:6), then...

* Separate yourself from them (v. 17; Rev. 18:4; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 Cor. 6:14; 2 John 1:7-11)

3. Be **anticipating deliverance (16:20)**

* The battle for the truth is demanding, incessant and wearisome, so we can feel weakened or feel alone in the battle or wonder if the vigilance really matters, so Paul reminds us of God's promise and His provision.

1. Anticipate God's deliverance from Satan ("the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"): We can enjoy victory now (1 John 4:4; James 5:8) while we look forward to the day Satan and His demons are forever thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10)

2. Anticipate God's deliverance through "grace": God's all-sufficient "grace" enables us to fight, resist, discern, put on the armor, refute, grow, contend and turn away from the deceivers.