



Text: Romans 16:17-20, 25-27<sup>1</sup>  
Series: Right Living  
Title: Part 25 -- Be Careful, Be Confident  
Date: February 15, 2009  
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

This morning we come to the end of Paul's Letter to the Romans. As Paul closes off this great letter, this letter that is full of the Gospel, full of God's grace, full of the mercies of God and full of the invitation to "right living" motivated by and empowered by the righteousness of God, Paul has time for just two brief, final messages. The first is a word of warning; the second is a word of encouragement.

First, we begin with the word of warning. Paul wrote...

**<sup>17</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. <sup>19</sup> For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**

Paul is essentially saying...

### ***Be Careful!***

The way in which Paul writes this warning suggests that the problem people he has in mind are not yet in Rome, but Paul is sure that they are coming! And he has reason to be concerned. The divisions that these people brought had already sprung up in the church in Corinth and had caused terrible problems for the church. (1 Cor 1:10-17). In the church in Thessalonica there were people who called themselves "brothers" but who taught doctrine that was contrary to the doctrine that Paul taught and the church there had had to take serious action to deal with these false brothers. (2 Thess 3:6) And the great church of Philippi, a church that had a great future if they could just stay the course, was facing an imminent threat from problem people. Even though the church there was strong, Paul had to warn the Philippians about people who were just over their horizon. He had written to them...

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



**“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” Philippians 3:18-19**

Paul was concerned for the Romans, the Thessalonians and the Philippians and virtually every other church he established. It seemed as if the churches were under constant danger from the virus of false teaching. Do we need to be concerned? Absolutely! With television and the internet, this virus doesn't even need to walk through the doors of our church in order to impact our church's life.

Paul doesn't name any of the people about whom he's concerned and I'm glad he doesn't because it isn't the names we need to know. It's the identifying marks of their ministry we need to watch out for.

**First** of all, I want you to notice the results of their work. Paul tells us to...

***Watch out for people who cause divisions among Christians***

**“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles” Romans 16:17**

Now please understand that the Gospel itself causes divisions. Jesus said...

**“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ... And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:34-35, 38**

Paul even spoke about the “obstacle” that the Gospel creates for people who want to earn their own salvation by their own effort. Many of the Jews of his day were trying to establish their own right standing with God through obedience to the Law of Moses. The Gospel message that right standing with God is by faith alone in Christ alone was an “obstacle” they could not negotiate. Paul wrote of them...

**“they did not pursue it [right standing with God] by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone....” Romans 9:32**

The “division” that the Gospel creates is between those who by faith accept Jesus Christ as their sin-bearing Saviour and those who reject him. That is an unavoidable division. But the kind of division Paul is thinking about here at the end of Romans is a division created between those who believe in Jesus. Watch out, Paul tells us, for people who like to separate Christians from one another.



Keep your eye on people who cause separation between Christians who once shared fellowship with one another. Stay away from them. Have nothing to do with them. “Avoid them.”

When I was a youth pastor in Toronto I came across one of these groups working on the U of T campus. They had several teachings that were contrary to the Gospel but one of the most damaging teachings was that they required their followers to break off contact with other believers who didn't think as they thought, and that included family. One of my young adults was being aggressively recruited by these folks. She was being constantly bombarded with invitations to supper and she came to me wondering what to do. They wouldn't take no for an answer. My advice: Have nothing to do with them! Don't return their calls. Don't explain why. Just, don't! And that's what she did. And eventually they quit bothering her and went on to pester someone else.

**Secondly**, I want you to notice the motivation of these people. Paul tells us to...

***Watch out for people who serve themselves, not the Lord.***

Paul says that these people...

**“do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites” Romans 16:18**

The word “appetites” translates a word that literally means “belly” or “stomach.” He'd said something very similar in his warning to the Philippians when he wrote that “their god is their belly.” (Php. 3:19). Paul could have been referring to people who were “pleasure-seeking libertines” who focused their lives on satisfying their own wants. He wrote to Timothy, his pastoral protégé, to warn him...

**“that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4**

But people who serve their own “bellies” are not necessarily “pleasure-loving” people. In Paul's day there were many false teachers who were very strict about what they put into their stomachs. He also warned Timothy that...

**“in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” 1 Timothy 4:1-3**



You might call these people as the “hair-shirt belly lovers.” They were ascetics who by their extreme concern about what they put into their stomachs, turned their stomachs into their gods.

Both groups, the libertines and the ascetics, were serving their own wants not the Lord. You’ll still find both groups today. You’ll find false teachers in the libertine camp who are “in it for the money.” Stay away from teachers with lavish lifestyles who promise big financial rewards. And you’ll find false teachers in the “ascetic” camp who love to control people by setting strict rules for their followers. Stay away from them!

But perhaps the most common and most subtle form of self-pleasing is the love of fame and notoriety. As the Bible scholar, Douglas Moo, wrote, “TIME magazine does not run articles on orthodox theologians.” He makes a compelling point when he says that more publicity comes “to people who teach new or strange things than to those who plod along, following the lines of truth laid down in Scripture and in the history of the church.”<sup>2</sup> People, follow the “plodders.” Follow the people who teach the historic faith of the church of Jesus Christ.

Our culture loves the “new” thing. Consumerism is one of the major themes of our culture. The current worldwide economic fiasco owes much of its existence to consumerism. Consumerism is based on a hunger for what is new. We are set up by our culture to listen to “new teachers” when instead, as Paul says, we should have nothing to do with them.

**Thirdly**, I want you to pay careful attention to the means these people use.

### ***Watch out for “warm and fuzzy” teaching***

Paul tells us that ...

**“by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” Romans 16:18**

We’re going to stop here for a moment and get very close to Paul’s words. The English phrase, “**smooth talk**,” translates a single compound Greek word. It’s made up of two words that literally mean, “kind words.”

And I want you to notice the word “**flattery**.” It, too, is a compound word in Greek which literally means, “good words.” This Greek word occurs sixteen times in the New Testament. Eleven times it’s translated as “blessing,” twice as “gift,” twice as “bountifully,” and only once, right here, is it translated as something negative.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, p. 515



*Think about this with me:* something changes “kind words” into “smooth talk;” and the same thing changes “blessing” into “flattery.” What is it? It’s the self-serving, twisted motives of the false teachers who want to get something from you and me. They either want our submission to their ideas or they want our money or they want us to become part of their entourage of adoring fans. **So, how do we tell the difference?**

False teachers sound appealing – very appealing! Paul struggled with this problem all the time because he didn’t come off as “warm and fuzzy.” He was frequently forced to defend his role as God’s inspired teacher against other teachers who were much more appealing than he was. He wrote to the Corinthians, who seemed particularly vulnerable to “smooth talk,” to remind them that when he had preached there, he...

**“did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” 1  
Corinthians 2:1-5**

How do we discern the difference between “flattery” and “blessing”? One yard stick to apply is “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” How central is the cross of Christ in the teaching? Is the truth that it was our sin that drove Christ to the cross clearly taught? How frequently is Jesus the focus of the teaching? Is he alone exalted or is he merely used as a ploy to exalt people?

Don’t be duped by slick presentation and “warm fuzzy” feelings. God’s truth does not always make you feel good or make you laugh. God’s truth is not to be measured by its entertainment value. God’s truth often addresses our sin and rebellion, it often makes us feel guilty – the Bible calls that “the conviction of sin” and it is necessary to experience it before we can experience the joy of forgiveness and the peace of God’s salvation in Christ. God’s truth often makes us tremble as it brings us face to face with the truth of God’s holiness and majesty. The Bible calls that feeling “humility” and if we’re ever going to truly glorify God as God in our lives, we need to climb down off our own spiritual pedestals and we need to exalt the sovereign, holy, righteous, gracious, loving Saviour God alone! Beware of preaching that tells you what you want to hear!

**Finally**, I want you to notice the content problem of the false teachers.

***Watch out for teaching that differs from the Bible***

Paul tells us to...



**“watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught” Romans 16:17**

The first eleven chapters of Paul’s Letter to the Romans deal with doctrine. As we went through those early chapters we talked about the doctrine of sinful depravity and about the doctrines of justification, redemption and propitiation; we looked at what Paul had to say about hell and eternal judgment; we examined his teaching about God’s grace and his gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ; we studied the wonderful, mind-expanding, heart-filling doctrine of the sovereignty of God – and so much more! Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine! The rest of Paul’s letters and the other New Testament books are full of doctrine.

Brothers and sisters, one of the most important means we have to safe-guard our minds and our lives from the inroads of false teachers is the knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture. Paul points to a group who are especially vulnerable to the work of false teachers – he calls them “naïve.” These are people who lack knowledge of the truth that enables them to evaluate the teachings of false teachers. Naivety, brothers and sisters, is not a spiritual virtue! The word that is translated “naïve” literally means “un-bad.” One Bible scholar, J.A. Bengel, said of this word “un-bad” that it was “an indifferent word. They are called so,” he said, “who are merely without positive wickedness, when they ought to abound also in prudence, and to guard against other men’s wickedness.”<sup>3</sup>

The writer of Proverbs talks about people who are spiritually naïve. He calls them “simple.”<sup>4</sup> He rebukes the simple:

**“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?” Proverbs 1:22**

Ignorance is bliss! But it’s not a virtue for those who want to follow God. The writer of Proverbs recommends an antidote for simplicity and naivety.

**“O simple ones, learn prudence” Proverbs 8:5**

Prudence is another word for wisdom and discernment and the Bible tells us that we learn wisdom and discernment when we immerse ourselves in God’s truth and allow it to shape our minds and our understanding. Paul commended Timothy for the fact that his life had been shaped from his childhood by the study of the books of the Old Testament Scriptures...

**“the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that**

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<sup>3</sup>Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (3:182). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> The LXX uses *akakos* (*un-bad*) to translate the Hebrew word for “simple” in Prov 1:4; 1:22; 8:5; 14:15.



**the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” 2  
Timothy 3:15-16**

Knowing the Word of God and the doctrines it contains is the antidote to spiritual naivety. And the lack of doctrinal awareness is one of the greatest dangers facing the church of Jesus Christ today.

Forgive me, but this morning I’m going to expose you to the teaching of someone who falls into the categories of warning that Paul has outlined for us. In just a moment, I’m going to show you a short passage from a book written by someone who uses Christian language but whose teaching I believe to be “contrary to the doctrine” that Paul taught. I took this passage directly from this individual’s website. It was on the website’s main page and so this person obviously wanted to draw attention to this passage. I’m not going to tell you who wrote – “who” isn’t the issue, “what” is the issue. I’ll read the passage for you and I want you to identify where this person deviates from Biblical truth. OK? Here it is. This individual wrote...

**“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”<sup>5</sup>**

Take a moment, think about it, reflect on the Scriptures. I’ll give you a just moment to think about it.

There are several issues you might identify but I’m going to highlight just one. Is it the Bible’s message that “our light, not our darkness” is what most frightens us? Is it the Bible’s message that we must “let our own light shine”? Or is our greatest need the removal of the darkness that is within us – within all of us?

Paul wrote...

**“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one**

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<sup>5</sup> Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, <http://www.marianne.com/> Copyright © 2008 Marianne Williamson, iAmplify. All rights reserved.



**does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:10-18**

These Scripture are central to Paul’s **doctrine of sinful depravity**. The person who wrote this clearly lacks an understanding of the insidious nature of sin. Our biggest fear should not be of how wonderful we are but of how guilty we are before God’s wrath against sin.

Is God’s light in all of us? Paul wrote to church in the city of Ephesus...

**“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things [Paul had listed a short catalogue of common sins] the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” Ephesians 5:6-8**

Once we were darkness, now we are light in the Lord. How did that light come to shine in us? Paul wrote to the church in Corinth...

**“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6**

God’s light comes into our lives the moment we believe in Jesus Christ – and not one moment before! And be clear – it’s the light of Jesus Christ that shines in us and out from us, not my light or your light.

I didn’t choose this text from the internet at random. I didn’t choose this text because this person is a frequent guest on a popular daily talk show, which they are. Sadly, I first encountered it in a fundraising letter I received from a very committed young Christian who is seeking to establish a ministry to encourage and uplift others. I wrote back, affirming this person’s desire and giftedness for ministry but encouraging them to be rooted solidly in the teaching of the Bible and to be aware of the dangers of being misled.

Brothers and sisters...watch out! Be aware of the ongoing danger of false teachers.

Brothers and sisters, I “appeal to you” with the love of Christ ... wise up! Don’t be naïve. Learn prudence. Study the Scriptures. Learn and hold to the doctrines of God’s Word.



And now for Paul's word of encouragement. As you hold to the truth of God's Word, you can...

***Be Confident!***

**“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” Romans 16:25, 27**

It's the Gospel of Jesus Christ that will give us the strength to stand against false teachers, against the overwhelming circumstances of life, against the darkness and despair of our own sin and failure, against the fear of death.

As I conclude this series in Romans I want to lead you down what many have called, **“The Romans Road.”** It's a series of Scriptures from Paul's letter that effectively outline the way of salvation.

**The first stop** on the road is one that tells us what our greatest need really is. Paul wrote that...

**“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23**

Our biggest problem is not that our light is bright and glorious. Our problem is that we have fallen far short of God's standard of righteousness and goodness. Standing in the light of his glory, our failures are displayed in all their hideous clarity. He is holy, we are not. He is righteous, we are not. He is truth, he is love, he is good and we are not. He is God and our sin is that we want to be god!

Have you discovered the truth of your sin? If you haven't, perhaps it's because you're comparing yourself with me, or your father or your sister or someone else who wronged you. Try comparing yourself with the perfection of God and see how well you come off. We're all sinners! And we're all sinners in terrible danger.

We discover how great our danger is at **the second stop** on *The Romans Road*. Paul wrote...

**“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23**

I love way in which our danger and our deliverance are mentioned in the same breath by the Holy Spirit as he moved Paul to write these words. The death that Paul has in mind is more than our physical death. We know that because the gift he tells us about is “eternal life.”



We will all die, but only those who have received God's gift in Jesus will have eternal life. Those who die with their sin problem unresolved face an eternal death. The Bible calls that place of eternal death, hell. And Paul tells us that we go there because we've earned the right – our wages for our sin is an eternal death under the wrath of God.

But there's hope! It's already announced here but at **the third stop** on the road we learn more. Paul wrote...

**“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8**

When Jesus Christ died on the cross 2000 years ago, he was dying a death on our behalf. He took our wages for us. He died in our place. He received God's wrath against sin for us.

Many of the false teachings you will encounter in our world are based on a false view of God's love. False teachers talk about the love of God but they separate it from the cross of Jesus Christ and from our sin that drove him there. Here, in one verse, God's love and justice meet, providing us with a solution to our sin problem. The Father, in love, directed his Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place. The Son, out of love for us, chose to be obedient to the Father's will. He willingly went to the cross and died in our place.

God's wrath against our sin has been poured out upon Jesus Christ. Because of that, God has lifted the eternal death penalty that hung over us and has invited us to experience his eternal love forever in his embrace.

**The fourth stop** on the road tells us how we can respond to God's invitation. Paul tells us that...

**“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10**

To confess that “Jesus is Lord” is to declare that Jesus is God who has come to save us. Jesus was more than a man – he was the Lord God born as a man. When Jesus died on the cross, God was himself taking our punishment for sin. To confess that “Jesus is Lord” is also to acknowledge that he is the God who rules over your life. He can rule over our lives because he is alive. He died on the cross to take our sin punishment but he rose again from the dead three days later as a promise that one day, you and I will live even though we die.

When Paul talks about being “saved” what he has in mind is the wrath of God against sin. One day, every person who has ever lived will stand before the



judgment of God. Only those who have believed on Jesus the Lord will be saved from God's punishment against sin.

Being saved isn't about doing good works or being a nice person. The only thing that will save us from God's punishment for sin is faith in Jesus Christ, the one who died in our place and took our punishment. But God's plan isn't only about escaping from the wrath of God on the Day of Judgment. The moment we acknowledge Jesus as Lord we come into a relationship with God.

**The fifth stop** on The Romans Road is all about the new life with God that begins the moment we believe in Jesus. Paul wrote...

**“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2**

God's grace is everything we need to live our lives. It's his forgiveness when we've stumbled and fallen for the umpteenth time. It's his guidance when we need direction in life. It's his provision when we're low on food or clothing or when we need a job. It's his comfort when we grieve; it's his love when we're aching; it's his hope when we're at the end of our rope. Because of our simple faith in Jesus Christ, we have been given access to all of God's great goodness. And it's ours right now, while we're living on this side of heaven.

**The last stop** on the Romans Road is really a concise road map for our spiritual journey from the day on which we come to know Jesus Christ as Lord until the day we see him face to face. Paul wrote...

**“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1-2**

How should we respond when we consider all that God has done for us in lifting our sin problem from our shoulders, giving us the gift of eternal life and opening his grace to us? The only adequate response is to live every day of our lives in dedication to the God who loved us and saved us for his eternal home.

**“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” Romans 16:25, 27**



As I studied Paul's doxology this week, the chorus of a song came into my mind. I don't remember where I first heard it, but the words were clear and strong as if I'd known it for years.

**“Be strong, be strong, be strong in the Lord;  
And be of good courage, for He is your guide.  
Be strong, be strong, be strong in the Lord;  
And rejoice for the vict'ry is yours.”**

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We sang it earlier in the service and I hope it will encourage you with the truth that God is able to strengthen you by his Gospel and that in his strength you can stand.

- **Invitation to Prayer** – call Ministry Team forward
- **Final Song:** Be Strong in the Lord (#734)
- **Benediction:** Jude 24-25

**“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” Jude 24-25**