

Romans 16:17-20 NIV

Watch out for these troublemakers.

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ⁽¹⁸⁾ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome about 58 AD.

Church people in that big city faced many frustrations that beset us.

Populations moved about in those times.

- Few were happy with the government.
- Politicians were greedy and power hungry.
- Taxes were high and so were prices.
- Death stalked everybody.
 - People searched for meaning.
 - They longed for real belonging.

This Romans text cautions us about dividing churches, but it's really about belonging.

Do you feel confident that you belong somewhere?

I admire parents who instill a sense of belonging in their children so each child feels needed and important to the family.

For a while, children need that security, that sense of belonging.

I didn't adequately help our kids feel they belonged.

Yet, the time arrives when the child must leave the nest and create a home and help his/her own kids feel they fit in.



I understand that mom and dad robins eventually push their kids out of the nest.

That point comes in human families, too, far earlier than what many sociologists, psychologists, and politicians will admit.

Regardless of our age, we need to feel we belong.

Jesus lived and died to make it possible for us to belong to the greatest family ever.

“You are no longer outsiders and strangers. You are citizens together with God's people. You are also members of God's family.”¹

Belonging isn't based on money, or intelligence, or birthright, or color, or social status.

How can we belong to this great family?

It has to do with whom you believe and who controls your life.

¹ Ephesians 2:19 NIRV

- Believe that Jesus is God's only Son;
- Believe That Jesus died to forgive you;
- That he lived a perfect example of obedience to God;
- **That God raised him from the dead three days after envious, hateful people killed him;**
- That Jesus holds God's power and will come back to judge everyone by his moral example.
People who believe in Jesus, belong to him, and join other believers are the church.

Romans chapter 16 tells us that the church in Rome was not a building.

The church was comprised of believers, who weekly or oftener, met in homes, praised God and recalled Jesus sacrifice.

They realized they belonged to God and one another.

Those same believers told their friends and loved ones how Jesus forgave them by dying on the cross.

They told how Jesus destroyed death and how everyone can share the joy of belonging.

They looked out for one another as a family.

They knew this world is a temporary testing and proving zone.

Only God and things close to him last forever.



As farmers burn unwanted grass and weeds, everything on earth will go up in flames.

The church praises God.

Honors Jesus.

The church works harmoniously in sharing Jesus' good news of forgiveness and victory over death.

In this temporary "work zone," we love, serve, forgive; we unite as one family till Jesus returns.

People who believe and act for Jesus find meaning and feel they belong.

That's why unity in Christ's family is so vital.

1 Corinthians 12 compares the church to a human body.

Every body part is special.

In healthy bodies, every part works harmoniously with all the other parts.

We don't want diseases or foreign objects to disrupt our body's unity.

We must be wary of those who divide the Church, which is Jesus' body.

Mangled, ripped apart, oozing flesh bodies make good Friday night horror movies, some think.

In life, it's tragic to see severed or dysfunctional bodies.

A woman who attended the Hollywood church lived in the same downtown hotel room 24 years. After calling on her a few times I discovered that she hid two severe addictions.

- **First, she bet on the horses at Hollywood Park and Santa Anita race tracks.**
- **Second, she drank heavily.**



One day I found her drunk, fallen against a steam heater; she had lain there for hours resulting in seared flesh in her wrist.

The ugly wound exposed ligaments and bones. For some reason paramedics would not come, so I drove her to a hospital and carried her in myself.

Her body never functioned again as God designed.

As dreadful as that is, rifts and splits in the Church are even more terrible.

Bodies can become whole in the resurrection, but rifts and splits in the Church may harm people eternally.

The Lord wants us to keep His Church, the body of Christ healthy and unified.

Unfortunately, some think nothing of dividing it.

A few points about church division:

1. **Our text says: watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way . . .**

What does he mean, "watch out for"?

Literally. "Scope out"- "observe and mark."

Watch out for them, "scope them out."

Mark them.

In the Church, whom do "we watch out for"?

Those who divide the body.

How do they cause division?

2. **That leads us to our second point. Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way contrary to the teaching you have learned.**

What teaching did they learn?

Acts 2:42 says: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."²

The New Testament tells the Apostles' teaching. Every book in the New Testament was written either by an Apostle or someone close to an Apostle.

If we aren't following New Testament teaching, we divide the church, Christ's body.

Does Jesus' way in the NT guide your life?

Or do you go by what your favorite politician or newscaster or union or preacher says?

² Acts 2:42: NIV

God wants us to change our selfish ways,
Honor Him and live by standards Jesus set.

People say: "Jesus lived two thousand years ago; we're more enlightened now."

I am indebted to scientists and medical people for helping me live longer.

I thank God for them.

I'm not sure everybody is happy I'm still here.

That leads me to ask four questions in respect to the advancements in science, technology, etc.

- A. Have improvements in these fields made people happier, more fulfilled and given them greater peace of mind?**
- B. How many truly happy people have you spoken with the past six months?**
- C. Is fear of death increasing or decreasing?**
- D. Do many people you know feel a sense of belonging to something significant?**

3. **Point:** Only by believing God, following Christ, and being part of God's family can anyone really belong.

Why is that so?

Christ brought permanent Good News.

Jesus did something no politician can do.

- **He forgave our guilt.**
- **He proved the power of love.**
- **He defeated death.**

Jesus used comparisons that indicate change.

**God's way is light in the darkness,
leaven that changes dough,
salt that preserves,
a body that matures.**



On country roads at night headlights convert lonely darkness to light.

Leaven makes homemade bread great.

Salt makes even the white of an egg palatable, not tasty, but at least edible.

We expect babies to grow and thrive.

Light, leaven, salt, and maturity strongly symbolize the effects of Christ's message.

Originally, the church was:

- **People on the move excited by the news that God appeared on earth in the form of Jesus.**
- **Folks thankful that Jesus was crucified for our faults and raised from the dead three days later.**
- **A bunch of ordinary guys along with some dedicated women turning the world upside down with the Good News and willing to suffer for that cause.**

It transformed drug and alcohol-addicted people to happy sobriety and living responsibly.

It changed people from acting immorally into loving, committed-to-their-spouse family folks.

It mended marriages, created happier children, and helped people become more respectful of their governments and society.

It caused formerly deadbeat people to pay their bills and to owe others only the debt of love.

It helped troubled people achieve inner peace.

Government programs didn't accomplish it.

It resulted from people hearing the good news, believing in Jesus, and living by his principles.

Jesus' message powerfully changes people.

But something began blunting Jesus' message and negatively affected the church.

Keeping people happy became more important than obeying God's word as the Apostles taught.

Instead of going everywhere telling the message, Christians began building impressive church meetings places.

They focused on being comfortable and living in a snug, cozy society.

They wanted respectability.



They worried about the future and listened to prophets of gloom.

They stopped talking about guilt and repentance before God.

They tried to make everyone feel good.

They began using political solutions to the world's ills not Christ-centered ones.

Here's the heart of Jesus' Good News:

One, the example of perfect godliness Jesus lived.

Two, the forgiving love he practiced that paid the debt we owe for our pride and disobedience.

Three, Jesus' defeat of death.

The Apostles saw him die, and doubted his resurrection until

Jesus gave them many proofs that he was alive.

Suppose someone you love and highly respect dies at the hands of envious, bitter people.

You see him die, you know he's dead, and he's placed in a tomb.

Three days later you see him alive.

He eats with you, talks with you, and shows you the wounds that caused his death.

He's the same person, yet he's different.

He can appear and reappear; his resurrection body will never die again.

**No more funerals for him,
no more crying, or tears.**

Your friend tells you how
you can experience what he did.

Trust God. Live as your friend did.

**Follow his instructions, and you, too, can come
back from death.**

**You will be judged by his standard; not by
any human judge or professor, or politician.**

He wants you to share this info with as many
people as you can, but they must follow the
loving instructions he gave you.

They must not change anything or
alter any part of his instructions.

Remember, you'll be judged by his life-example.

The Apostles' teaching in the NT is that vital.

It's important that we know it.

We must recognize when teachers depart from it.

We need to watch out for people who cause
division as we try to tell Jesus' message.

**Nothing in this world
equates to his message.**

**Nothing equals belonging to
God's Kingdom.**



**It's vital to know what the Scriptures say about
Jesus because we'll be judged by his standard.**

We'll all face Jesus in the Judgment.

Challenge yourself to daily read the Scriptures.

Align your life with Christ.

- **Be able to identify those who cause divisions
and cause others to stumble.**

- **Be ready for God's judgment.**

You'll be a part of the most important task ever.

That's real belonging, isn't it?

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