

Romans 16:17-27

“A Final Farewell”

We come today to the conclusion of the book of Romans, and as Paul bids a final farewell to those to whom he is writing, we bid a final farewell to that which he has written to them. Oh not personally (the book of Romans is worthy of our study, over and over and over again as is all of the Word of God) but collectively in our studies together our time spent in the book of Romans concludes today. and I'm not sure where you stand but for me it's been an incredible journey, we've seen summit peaks of *theology*, plummeted deep into the depths of man's *depravity*; we've seen how the plan God in Jesus Christ unfolds for us *practically*. We've received insight and understanding, revelation, illumination and application as to who God is, who we are before Him, and what it means to lead a life that's set apart *to* Him. How that we're to serve Him out of the overflow of our love *for* Him, and one of the very real ways that we serve the Lord is to serve others. Which is exactly the topic at hand that we were really focusing on last week, Ch 16 brings us into that proper perspective of the heart of God for *others*, for people.

There's a reason Paul has taken the time to teach us such radical insights into the heart and mind of God and that's so that we might be effective in not only our pursuit to know Him, but to make Him known, God *loves* people. That was the whole point in Jesus' coming, it wasn't to teach us philosophy, or give us mind boggling concepts of theology. The bible is clear that, “...*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” John 3:16-17 God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. and One of the reoccurring themes that I briefly pointed out to you last week in this list of people that Paul greets here in Romans Ch 16 is that of the sacrifice and service of those whom God has chosen to record in the chronicles of His Word here in this final Ch of the book of Romans. They were those who were laboring *in* the Lord, giving of themselves sacrificially *to* the Lord, and we find them being honored, *by* the Lord.

Let me just tell you that you can't out give God, you give of yourself to the Lord, sacrifice your time, efforts, energies and abilities *for* the Lord and He's going to honor that and bless your efforts *in* that. and You might not see the full effect here and now, don't worry about that, I think that often times we desire our reward here and now to a fault. God's got an eternal reward waiting for you, why settle out for a temporal reward that perishes? We serve God temporally; (in this life) He rewards us *eternally*.

The bible says, “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*” 1 Cor 2:9 and So we read, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*” 1 Cor 15:58 I’ll give you one more, “*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*” Gal 6:9-10 God wants to use your life to be a blessing to others in His name, the desire being A.) That they might come to know Him, or B.) That they would be built up *in Him*.

Well, as you read through these 1st 16 Vs you find Paul greeting, and saying goodbye to various people that he’d ministered *with* or had come to *know* throughout his ministry. and He’s saying, “Greet so and so,” and “Say ‘hi’ to that gal” and “Make sure you greet *those* guys,” but here in Vs 17 in the midst of this final farewell he takes a moment to offer a final word of warning. You see lest the general perspective become, “Hey, greet everyone, accept everyone, just be all warm and fuzzy about everything and everybody, put on your rose colored glasses and enjoy life!” He takes the time to clarify the fact that “yes” as a general rule we’re to *accept* people, but there *are* times when we’re to *avoid* people, notice.

Vs17-18

So in the midst of all of these warm greetings and goodbyes Paul takes a moment to bring to our attention the fact that we’re to be wise in our overlooking and acceptance of everyone and everything. In Vs 16 he says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” *But* (Vs 17) “I urge you,” that is, “I *beg* of you, I *beseech* you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and *avoid* them.” That word, “note” is the Greek word “Skopeo” from which we get our word, “scope.” “Keep them in the cross hairs” he’s saying, “take aim at them.” and The idea here is to observe intently, to mark them, to fix one’s eyes upon, or to direct one’s attention to, scrutinize them closely, carefully, and avoid them. and There are really 2 groups of people here in view that we’re to be watching, that we’re to keep a close eye on and they are #1 Dividers, and #2 Deceivers.

He says, “Note those who cause divisions and offense.” Those who by means of what they say, or by means of what they do *divide* the body of Christ, those who cause division or disunity in the body. Right up there in the top 7 list of things God hates is division, and discord sown among the brethren. The proverbs tell us, “*These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.*” Prov 6:16-19 The bible is clear that it’s God desire, and God’s purpose and God’s plan that His body be unified, of one heart, one mind and one voice giving glory to Jesus Christ Over and over again throughout the NT we read things like, “*...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,*” Phil 1:27

In Phil 2 we read, “...*fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*” Phil 2:2 and Again in 1st Peter, “*Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;*” 1 Peter 3:8 The 133 Ps gives us that picture of the unique and distinctive anointing that God pours out upon a unified body of believers.

Of course the NT gives the insight into body life, how that even as our physical body has to be knit together in a manner of unity if we’re to function properly, so to is Christ. If my leg starts to spasm out of control, and my arm starts writhing in its own way, my eyes each look in a different direction, and my ears decide to tune out, I’m going to be rendered pretty much (if not entirely) ineffective. and Yet so much of the body of Christ is that way, various parts of the body out of sorts with the desire and direction of the Head (Jesus Christ). and We wonder why the church is so non-effective. So Paul says, “Watch out for those who would seek to divide you.”

“Watch out for those who would seek to *deceive* you.” When he speaks of people coming to us with things “Contrary to the doctrine (or teaching) which we’ve learned,” that speaks of deceit. and So the exhortation is that we safeguard the integrity of the balanced truth of the Word of God. Note those who come to you with deceitful doctrines that don’t hold true to the Word of God rightly divided. The other day I was getting ready to go into my front door when I realized there was a magazine there on my porch entitled, “Awake.” and I wasn’t sure at 1st what it was but as I opened the pages it didn’t take me long to realize it’d been left there by some J.W.’s and It was laid out pretty crafty, seemed like a standard magazine of sorts and then in the very back (after it had gained your trust through every other article) there was an article entitled something to the effect of, “Is there only 1 God?” and In it, it tried to get fairly theological sounding and it was intellectual in nature and was differentiating between divine, and deity, and ultimately it said that though Jesus was divine, He wasn’t deity and was never portrayed in the scriptures as an object of worship.

The article tried to diffuse John 1:1 regarding the clear cut statement of Jesus as God, and after the resurrection when Thomas proclaimed of Christ upon seeing Him alive, “*My Lord and my God!*” John 20:28 Saying that in the original language the words used for “God” really weren’t “God” in the uppercase sense, but “god” in the lowercase sense, which is a total fabrication and a bold faced lie. Jesus is portrayed all over the NT as an object of worship, He never once refused *anyone*’s worship (as do angels, or as did the apostles), you see Him receiving praise and worship in multiple places in the book of Rev and the Greek language in no way shape or form seeks to undermine, or take away from the reality of the deity of Jesus Christ in the use of it’s verbiage, it’s not confused at all, its very clear. As a matter of fact a literal rendering of John 1:1 reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *God was the Word.*” Now there’s nothing about that that’s uncertain, or unclear, it’s incredibly obvious.

So we're to safeguard the truth, the integrity of the Word of God, and we're to safeguard the unity of the body of Christ. We need both, because truth with out unity leads to pride, but unity with out truth leads to a departure of the integrity and truth of the Word of God. So the exhortation is 2-fold, safeguard unity in the body, and the truth of God's Word.

But there are those who will seek to deceive you in a manner contrary to the doctrine which you have learned. What then are you to do? Don't engage them, don't accept them, don't seek to debate them, argue with them, or understand them, *avoid* them, don't greet them, get away from them. Why?

Vs 18

You see there it is, "By smooth words and flattering speech they *deceive* the hearts of the simple." Or the "unsuspecting," "harmless" people just out there trying to love the Lord and live life. It's not a reference to dummies, "simple" in that respect, but simply unsuspecting, people that can be taken advantage of, new believers are prime targets. But Paul says here, "You've got to watch these guys because they're not serving our Lord Jesus Christ but their own bellies." Or to understand that another way he's saying they're slaves to their own fleshly appetites. To the Philippians Paul put it like this, "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things.*" Phil 3:18-19

They don't serve *our* Lord Jesus Christ and That's why you've got to be careful when you're speaking to a J.W. or Mormon, or a New Age activist, or someone who is into the "Christian science" thing. They may use the words "Jesus Christ" but believe me when I tell you that they're not in reference to *our Lord Jesus Christ* When a J.W. speaks of Jesus Christ he's speaking of Michael the arc-angel, doesn't believe Jesus rose bodily but in a spirit-form, that Jesus is inferior to God the Father, that He was a created being. When a Mormon uses the words "Jesus Christ" he's speaking of Satan's brother, he believes that Adam is the God of this world and the only God with which we have to do, he believes that Jesus practiced polygamy and had multiple wives. That's not *our* Lord Jesus Christ The New Ager says that Jesus is everywhere and in everything, he's the trees, the crystals, he's in you and in me, mother earth, he's the divine spark that's fanned through meditation and contemplation, that's not *my* Lord Jesus Christ The Christian Scientist says that Jesus is simply a Divine ideal, there's nothing evil or negative, hell doesn't exist, Jesus was a Master Whose primary purpose was to teach us a positive way to think and live. None of these people serve *our Lord Jesus Christ* But their own fleshly appetites, and by their smooth words and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the simple.

That's why we're not to dialogue and debate them endlessly, hey be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies with in you, that's right on. But to engage in endless debates is dangerous. Because many are the sincere believers who've sought to debate, and dialogue, argue and understand only to find themselves being confounded in their own position and shipwrecked in their faith. The Holy Spirit through Paul says, don't do it, don't engage, avoid, just get away from that stuff (he'll underscore that again here in a minute). But it's for your own protection, Satan is no dummy, and many are those who've thought they were strong theologically who've been destroyed and have succumbed to those who're inspired satanically.

But also because we need proper priorities, there's a whole field out there ripe for the harvest; that are ready and waiting for someone to share Christ with them, invest your time in energy in those fields rather than wrestling and wrangling, trying to win over those who're trying to deceive you. Just note them and avoid them.

Vs19

Now we've been speaking of groups that function outside these 4 walls generally speaking. But the scope isn't limited that way, there'll be those who come through those doors who have a secret agenda of their own. Oh, they may *think* they're on some great crusade, spearheading a great cause, but in reality they're deceitful, they're dividers of the body of Christ. and What Paul is saying here in reference to the Roman believers is that he realizes that this isn't necessarily happening yet, he gives them an incredible commendation, "Your obedience has become known to all." (Makes us kinda wonder what's become known about us, be it individually, or collectively). That he's aware of there's no major problem they need to confront, but in reality these things are coming. Because anywhere there's a genuine work of God, warfare will follow, and we're not to be ignorant of our enemy's devices. Remember when Paul was saying his final farewells to the Ephesian believers there in Acts Ch 20?

He said, "*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*" Acts 20:29-30 Jesus spoke of wolves in sheep's clothing, Jude called them spots in our love feasts, that though the feast with us with out fear, they serve only themselves.

That's the thing, these deceivers, these dividers they don't generally announce themselves. I can't remember a time that anyone came to me and said, "Pastor, I'm here to commence my campaign of division and deceiving so if you don't mind I'd like to take the pulpit next Sunday." That doesn't happen, that's why Jesus told us to watch and pray, to be wise as serpents, harmless or innocent as doves. Be alert to your surroundings, don't always assume that just because it's someone at church speaking with you that it must be safe and sane. Be careful to weigh everything in the balance of God's Word, and if something funky comes to you, avoid the individual and let us know.

Now look quickly at these 2 exhortations, “Be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.” Be wise in what is good, in other words be instructed in the Word of God, there’s a reason we go through the bible Vs by Vs Ch by Ch, we want to be wise in what is good, equipped in the Word of God, salt and light, the whole counsel. But we’re to be simple, or innocent concerning evil. I think this is a great exhortation. Because too often people dabble in unhealthy practices, or set evil things before their eyes because they, “Want to know what they’re up against.” They want to “be familiar with what other people are doing, or thinking so that they can combat it effectively.” Yet the bible is very clear, don’t get familiar with evil practices. You’ve heard it over and over again, the best way to spot a counterfeit is to be incredibly, intimately familiar with the genuine article.

Why not monitor those activities, or read up on ungodly things to be in the know? Quite frankly because God says don’t do it. Perhaps you recall as Israel was preparing to go into the Promised Land that God warned them about becoming ensnared by the pagan gods of the land. How? By enquiring of them, wanting to know, “How did they worship *their* gods, I’d like to be informed about it, tuned *into* it, what was their mindset,” and all the rest. and God warned them not to worry about what they’d done, but that they were just to do what He told them to. and So to with you, so to with me, don’t worry about how they’re thinking, or what they’re perspective is. Lest you inquire of it, or begin to desire after it, just pursue Jesus Christ with all your heart, be wise in what is good, but simple, stay away from that which is evil.

Vs20

A reference to the ultimate victory that we’ll all enjoy at the soon coming of Jesus Christ God will do the crushing, but He gives us a place in the victory, the enemy may win a battle here and there in our lives, but God will win the war.

Vs21-22

Now if in your mind you saw Paul sitting at a table with a candle flickering and the parchment rolled out before him with the quill pen being dipped in the vessel of ink there beside him writing this letter, sorry. Paul rarely wrote any of his own letters, he dictated them. and In this case it was Tertius to whom he dictated, and no doubt just like you and me he would be speaking to Tertius and every now and then he’d stop and say, “Now read that back to me.” and Tertius would say, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” and Paul would say, “Yeah, that’s good, that’s the Lord...and not only that we glory in tribulations...” and On he would go from there, so Tertius greets the Roman believers, what an amazing opportunity God gave him to pen the letter to the Romans for Paul the apostle.

Vs23-27

So as Paul rounds out the letter, he takes us full circle back to the beginning of the letter. Remember when Paul said that he couldn't wait to see them because he wanted to impart some spiritual gift to them that they might be established? That was his heart, to help them, to be there for them, help *establish* them, but ultimately Paul would point them beyond himself, it's not man that establishes you, it's God who does the work. He's *begun* the work, and He'll *complete* the work, there are all kinds of dangers, temptations, toils, and trials along the narrow path of the believer. Things through which the enemy would love nothing more than to ensnare you *by* and seduce you *away* from your relationship with Jesus Christ

But God is able to establish you, don't trust in man, don't think you can do it on your own, it's God who establishes us, who strengthens us and confirms us. and He does that through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ His Word will act as an anchor to your soul, rooting you, grounding you in your relationship with Him. He's able to establish you according to the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest and made known by the Prophetic scriptures. and Remember a NT mystery isn't some mysterious thing that's unknown, but rather it's something that's *been* made known, that's been brought into the light though previously it was in the shadows. and The mystery he's referencing is the fact that of the church, that both Jew and Gentile would enter the kingdom of Heaven on the same basis, that being by faith in Jesus Christ What he's communicating here is that it's been God's plan to save you from before the foundation of the world that you might become the bride of Christ.

God is able to establish you according to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to His plan and His purpose to save you from before the foundations of the earth, and according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith, (or the Word of God). What's the commandment of the everlasting God? Acts 17:30 God commands all men everywhere to repent, because He's appointed a day in which He'll judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained, the Man Christ Jesus. So by His Word, His foreordained plan/purpose, and a turning from sin unto Jesus Christ God will establish and strengthen His resolve in your life, for obedience to the faith.

Vs27

The book of Romans ends in praise, for God in His wisdom as displayed in the gospel, oh the value of wisdom, we spoke of that Wednesday evening. "...to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever." God in His wisdom came up with a plan that no human being could ever dream up, and if there's one thing that the book of Romans focuses on and walks us through from beginning to end it's the greatness of God's plan as demonstrated in the gospel of Jesus Christ and Paul wraps up and winds down his letter praising God for it.

What a fitting word to reflect on as we close today, this last word in Vs 27 just prior to “Amen” it’s the word, “Forever.” How long will God glorify Himself through the work and gospel of Jesus Christ? “Forever” How long does God want you to serve Him, to yield your life to Him? “Forever” How long will He keep you under shadow of His wings and in the safety of His arms? “Forever” and How long will you be in His presence as a personal witness and partaker of the glory of Jesus Christ? “Forever” Oh to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

Prayer Points: God we thank You for the unsearchable riches of Your Word, the innumerable blessings to be found in the book of Romans, and Your faithfulness to teach us as we’ve traveled through it. Help us Lord to be wise as serpents, gentle as doves, give us wisdom, discernment to take note of dividers, deceivers, those who would lead us astray. But we thank You that You are able to establish us. God we trust You for it, Jesus we thank You that You died for us, that You live in us, that You’re able to identify with us. May we abide in You, the truth of Your Word, unified as a body. Just be glorified in us, Lord we await the day that we see You face to face, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

If you’re not certain of that reality, if you’ve never given your heart to Christ I want to take this moment to extend to you an invitation to be assured of salvation, life everlasting in the person of Jesus Christ There’s no other way, nor is there any other name under heaven, given among men by which we *must* be saved. God wants to know you, to be known *by* you, and to forgive you of all your sin, but that offer is extended only in Jesus Christ So if God is dealing with you today, if you’re hearing His voice, don’t harden your heart, open your heart, let Him in, He’ll wash you whiter than snow.