

## 45. Learning to Build Unity in the Body

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to develop godly relationships with one another and with other Christians. We saw that Paul worked hard to build unity among the Christians and the various congregations that were in Rome by sharing various positive things about the various individuals and groups of Christians. However, there were also people in the church at Rome that were trying to cause divisions. As a result, we are going to see in this topic that Paul gives instructions about ways to recognize those who are trying to bring division to Christians and avoid such individuals so that the Christians can develop unity in the body.

Romans 16:17-20 says, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.” Here, we see that Paul told the Christians in Rome to note those who cause divisions and offenses.

The word that is translated “cause” means *to make, to do or to cause to happen*. The word that is translated “divisions” speaks of things that cause dissension or division. It is only used three times in the New Testament. In Galatians 5:19-21, it is mentioned in a list of the works of the flesh by people who are not Christians and is translated by the word “sorcery”. In 1 Corinthians 3:3, we read, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” In this verse, it is talking about Christians that are immature and are acting like those who are not Christians. As a result, in Romans it is talking about people who were not Christians and were working to cause divisions in the church. The word that is translated “offenses” means *to set a trap or a snare to cause people to stumble*. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.” Here, we see their goal was to cause others to fall.

We also see that these people were causing these divisions and creating these stumbling blocks by teaching false doctrines. Paul gave a similar warning to the leaders of the church at Ephesus. Acts 20:29-30 says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul warned about two types of teachers who teach false doctrines. The first group would be people who are not Christians who have as their goal to destroy the flock. The second group would be professing Christians who are trying to build followers of themselves instead of followers of the Lord. In Romans, we see that we are to avoid both types of teachers who teach false doctrines.

We also learn more about those who taught false doctrines in Rome served. Romans 16:18 says,

“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” We see that those who teach false doctrines do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Such false teachers seek to serve their own interests. Philippians 3:18-19 says, “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.” 1 Timothy 6:4-5 also describes such false teachers when those verses say, “He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of* gain. From such withdraw yourself.” The goal of such false teachers is to deceive the weaker Christians with their smooth words and flattering speech. Such false teachers seek money or some other form of self-gain.

We see the source of the teaching of such false teachers in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 where we read, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” False teachers pretend to be Christians so that they can deceive others. They actually follow Satan as they pursue their efforts to destroy others with their false teaching. Because their works are evil, they will receive eternal judgment. That is the reason why we want to help weaker Christians learn to avoid such false teachers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” Here, we see that we are to help Christians learn to recognize and separate themselves from false teachers.

Paul knew that the Christians in Rome wanted to be obedient to the Lord. He had written in Romans 1:8, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Christians everywhere knew about the faith of the Christians in Rome. As a result, Paul wanted them to have great understanding of the things that are pleasing to God. At the same time, he wanted to free them from the twisted and destructive teachings of those who were false teachers.

Paul also reminded the Christians in Rome that God would soon crush Satan. In Genesis 3:15, we read, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” The Seed that God promised would crush the head of Satan is Christ. Satan thought he had won the victory when Christ died on the cross. However, that victory was very short, like a bruise. On the third day, when Christ rose from the dead, Satan knew that he was defeated. Here, Paul was reminding the Christians to look forward to the day when Satan will receive his penalty of eternal judgment in the lake of fire and brimstone. In contrast, as Christians we can look forward to experiencing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

In Romans 16:21-24, Paul also sent greetings to the Christians in Rome from those who were serving the Lord with him. Timothy had been a part of the team with Paul for many years. Lucius,

Jason and Sosipater were either relatives of Paul or from the same country. Tertius was the man who did the actual writing of the book of Romans for Paul. There are four men named Gaius in the New Testament. Since Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, this would be the Gaius mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1. Here, we see that Paul had stayed with him and that his home was the meeting place for one of the congregations in the city of Corinth. Erastus was the treasurer of the city of Corinth. Quartus was also another brother in Christ who wanted to send his greetings to the church at Rome.

As Paul concluded his message to the church in Rome, Romans 16:25-27 says, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” Paul recognized that the Lord is the One who is able to establish every Christian. The word that is translated “establish” means *to strengthen or make firm*. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 says, “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.” Here, we see that the Lord is the One who gives strength to protect Christians from the evil one.

We have seen in the New Testament that a mystery is something revealed in the New Testament that was not revealed in the Old Testament. The most important mystery in the New Testament for the Gentiles is explained in Ephesians 3:3-6 where we read, “How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Paul had been faithful in sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles wherever he went so that mystery was clearly revealed to the Gentiles both by word and by letter.

In the Old Testament, God had said that Christ would bring the Gospel to all nations. Isaiah 42:6-7 says, “I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” Here, we see that this commandment was given by the everlasting God. This reminds us that the goal of God is to bring people of every nation for obedience to the faith. That is why all glory belongs to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, we see that the goal of God is much more than unity in the local church. The goal of God is the unity of all true believers from every tribe and nation.

It is a great privilege to be able to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to develop unity in the local church by helping weaker Christians learn to recognize false teachers and their teachings and to avoid them. It is an even greater privilege to help them learn to have a part in taking the Gospel to all nations so that all Christians may have true unity in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to help other Christians experience unity in Christ.