

Those Who Divide Cannot Hide

Romans 16:17-18

Paul has just encouraged the Christians at Rome to warmly greet one another, but now he says of those who cause division in the church to “*mark them . . . and avoid them.*” So on the one hand you have Paul saying “accept people” and on the other hand “avoid people.” This word “mark” (“watch out for” NIV) means “to notice, or observe” and is the same word Paul uses when he says “*to mark those who walk after me*” (Phil. 3:17). So there are some Christians you should embrace, and there are other Christians you should avoid.

You are to avoid Christians who cause division over the gospel

“Mark them which cause division . . . contrary to the doctrine ye have learned.” (v. 17).

The doctrine the Romans had learned was the doctrine of justification by grace. Justification is a declaration of God regarding sinners. In the courtroom of God, we, the guilty party, stand before the Judge who is righteous and **are declared** to be perfectly righteous through Jesus Christ, our representative. Justification is more than being forgiven of my sin; it is the declaration of God that the law has been perfectly kept by me.

I. The conduct of those you are to avoid.

(A). They cause separation . . .

Division is often unavoidable (Mt. 10:34), and the truth often divides (1 Pt. 2:8). In Paul’s day the Judaizers sought to oppose the gospel and teach that a sinner was made just before God through the keeping of the law himself. Paul is very clear “*if any man preach any other gospel . . . let him be accursed*” (Gal. 1:8).

(B). They create stumbling blocks . . .

This word “offense” (“obstacles” NIV) is the Greek word “skandalon.” It was the word used by the Greeks for the part of an animal trap to which the bait was attached. In the Bible it represents anything that causes a person to fall morally. “*Let no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way*” (14:13).

II. The character of those you are to avoid . . .

(A). They are consumed with self.

“They do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly” (v.18).

Everything revolves around their own comfort, their own pleasure, and their own satisfaction. Those who oppose the gospel of grace serve themselves.

(B). They are concerned with appearances.

“With smooth words and fair speeches they deceive the simple” (v.18).

The NIV says, “*By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the naïve*” (v.18).

When teachers become more interested in what people think about the way in which the gospel is presented more than the gospel itself, trouble looms.

(C). They are committed to obtain a following.

“They deceive the simple” (v.18). The Bible is very clear that Christian people are not to follow a man or a movement. We follow Jesus Christ. Our mission as pastors is to strengthen your relationship with Christ.