

## “How To Deal With Error” • Romans 16:17-18

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Providing Protection*

1. Here is a scene that has probably been replayed multiplied millions of times . . .
2. A child is playing, and being unmindful of the traffic in the street, starts to run into it
3. Dad, who is standing somewhere near and keeping a careful eye on junior, sees the child start to run into the street
4. Moving faster than he ever has before, he rushes to the child's side and sweeps him or her up into his arms
5. Then taking the little boy or girl back to a safe place, he repeats the words he has said many times before-
  - a. *never* run out into the street
  - b. and when you *do* have to cross a street, *always look both ways first*
6. I'm sure Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Roman, and Greek fathers all had this same experience
7. Their streets were lined with horses and carts and the occasional chariot
8. At our recent church picnic, a couple Sunday's ago, I saw a couple dads who had to go after their children who had wandered too close to the street

#### B. *Parenting*

1. You know, there is one part of being a father that I'd venture to say 99% of all men have wired
2. And that's the call to protect their children
3. Men can use the help of books and classes to help us in the multitude of *other* parenting skills,
  - a. but *protection of our families?*
  - b. that one we've nailed - that we can do

#### C. *Paul As Parent*

1. As an apostle, Paul was called to take the role of being something of a father to the church
  2. His unique calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles meant that he would break new ground and open new frontiers for the gospel
  3. And as a result, he became the spiritual mentor and father to thousands
  4. In writing to the church at Rome, Paul was exercising his authority as an apostle to define what it is that Christians believe
  5. And to this day, Romans serves as the premier manual for the Christian faith
  6. It's no wonder then that we would find, in the closing verses of Chapter 16 a word of warning from Paul who had the heart of a father
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7. This Thursday, I will leave for Russia for 12 days

- a. when I say goodbye to my family, I will hug and kiss them
- b. and then I will go to each of my children and give them both an expression of my love
- c. and a reminder of their duty to love each other
- d. then I will tell the three of them to be careful and stay out of trouble!
- 8. Paul does this very thing as he brings Romans to a close
  - a. he tells them of his love for them
  - b. he tells them to greet one another warmly and with a holy kiss
  - c. he reminds them of their duty to love and serve one another
  - d. and then, as a caring father, he issues them a word of warning and protection . . .

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 17

**{17} Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**

1. Paul would often preface something really important with the word, "I urge you" or "I beseech you"
  2. What he is about to say is of utmost importance, so he begins it with a word meant to arrest their attention
  3. He tells them to note those who cause divisions and offenses which are contrary to the truths they had already learned
  4. If Paul had some specific group or teaching in mind, we don't know
  5. But his instructions are clear enough; and the priority he is placing on them is high
  6. The word "note" means to *mark* or *identify*
    - a. it is the Greek word "skopeo"
    - b. and was used to describe the duty of a sentry who stood atop a wall or watchtower
    - c. the sentry had the duty of looking for any threat to the security of the city
    - d. and if an enemy did approach, it was his task to "scope" him out
      - 1) he would take careful note of the enemy's position
      - 2) and what he was doing
      - 3) he would also point out the enemy to other sentries along the wall and those who would come to replace him
      - 4) and the reason the sentry was careful to identify and point out the danger to others was so that the security and peace of the city might be maintained
  7. As we bring all of that back into verse 17, we see that Paul calls the Romans to be alert and watchful of those who brought doctrinal error in to the church
  8. If and when they were discovered, they were to be noted, marked, & identified so that others would take heed and avoid them
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9. The ones they were to note were those who caused divisions and offenses

- a. *division* is a deviation from the truth they had already received
  - b. it's a word which describes not just a minor difference of opinion on some cloudy doctrinal issue, but a full fledged denial and departure from the clear teaching of Scripture
  - c. *offenses* is the Greek word *skandala*
  - d. it is an obstacle that cause someone to trip and fall
10. What Paul is describing, we would call *heresy*
- a. a heresy is a teaching that denies a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith
  - b. it is a departure from the faith that if believed and carried to it's logical conclusion, causes a person to fall away
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11. Paul's exhortation is that we must be on guard against those who teach heresy
12. And having recognized them for who and what they are,
- a. we need to mark them,
  - b. we need to point them out to others so that they might be warned
  - c. and the peace and security of the family of God will not be disrupted
13. A teacher asked a child in Sunday School to define what is meant by "false doctrine"
- a. the boy replied that that's when the doctor gives the wrong stuff to people who are sick
  - b. he thought she had asked what false doctorin' was
  - c. but his answer fit both false doctorin' and false doctrine

## **B. A Timely Word**

1. What a timely word this is for us today
  2. As I'm sure you're aware, there is a lot of false teaching and doctrine being broadcast today
  3. Dozens of pseudo-Christian cults are having a field day in winning the unwary and untaught
  4. Even in the evangelical church, heresy has made huge inroads
  5. Yet when pastors and Christian leaders faithfully follow Paul's counsel here, and dare to point out false teaching and those who are spreading it, they are branded as unloving sticks in the mud
  6. *They* are accused of causing divisions and harming the unity of the Body of Christ
  7. Pointing out error does not divide the church - It is error is that causes division
  8. And it is this division caused by error that Paul urges us to take careful note of
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9. Ministries like *CRI* and *The Berean Call* are labeled as divisive by many today because they are doing precisely what verse 17 says
  10. Hank Hannegraff and Dave Hunt have been accused of damaging Christian unity
    - a. they haven't brought disunity to the Church
    - b. on the contrary, they have faithfully embraced Paul's command here

- c. and boldly pointed out those men, women, and movements which have taught things contrary to the scriptures
- 11. Let me say it again; pointing out error does not cause division:
  - a. error causes division!
  - b. because error IS a deviation from the truth
- 12. The unity God calls His people to is not merely an agreement to all get along and be nice to each other
- 13. It is a unity to Him
  - a. and since He is the God of Truth, our unity will be marked by a fierce loyalty to truth
  - b. any pursuit of unity in the Church that isn't submitted to the *higher principle* of truth, is *false* unity

### **C. Paul Modeled It**

1. Paul didn't just tell the Romans to mark heretics--he did it
2. In Acts 20 we find Paul's farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus
  - {26}** "I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*.
  - {27}** For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.
  - {28}** Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
  - {29}** For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.
  - {30}** Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.
  - {31}** Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.
3. This issue of being watchful for heresy was high on Paul's list of priorities
4. And he even went so far as to warn them that if would be from their own ranks that false teachers would rise
5. As a leader in the church, and in instructing these pastors at Ephesus, Paul told them to be watchful and on guard against error

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6. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul hammers the heresy of the Judaisers, who denied grace and told the Gentile believers they had to obey the ritual law of Moses in order to be saved
  - a. Paul marked these men and their teaching
  - b. and he denounced both it and them in the strongest terms
  - c. and when I say he used the strongest terms, I'm being *very* polite
7. In 1 Timothy, Paul was so bold as to name two men who had become apostates: Hymenaeus & Alexander
8. Jude follows Paul's example of marking heretics in his letter and gives some examples, not only of the things they were teaching, but the false way they were living
9. John marks heretics as those who deny either the deity or the humanity of Jesus: In fact, he calls the of the spirit of antichrist
10. With so much NT evidence for the need of leaders to point out both error and those who spread it,

11. It's surprising to see how negative the reaction to such faithfulness is today
  - a. of course, it usually comes from those who are slipping over into error

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12. As those of you know who have attended here for some time, I do occasionally mention the names of those who cause division because they teach error
  - a. I'm not in to stirring up controversy for controversy's sake
  - b. but I will speak to specific issues as they come up
  - c. last week I mentioned two men who stand at the forefront of what is one of the major heresies at work in the evangelical church today
  - d. and I know that some of you were unsettled by that
  - e. but you must understand, that as a pastor, as God has called and equipped me for this calling, He has given me a shepherd's heart
    - 1) and one of the shepherd's primary tasks is to defend and protect the flock
    - 2) just as you would expect me to protect you from some obvious outside attack
    - 3) so you must expect me to be vigilant for how the wolves will try to put on sheep's clothing and steal in among the flock

#### **D. The Devil's Sneaky Strategy**

1. You see, the devil is a liar and the father of lies
2. He knows that if you can't defeat us by an obvious frontal assault, he must switch tactics and try something more subtle
3. Since deception has always been his chief weapon, he uses it by sneaking in among the flock and then planting his seeds of doubt and lies
4. Remember that Paul warned the Ephesian elders that the wolves would come from their own number!
  - a. they would be wolves in sheep's clothing
  - b. they would even sound like sheep at first {baa}
  - c. but their true voice would soon be heard
5. In 2 Cor 11 Paul wrote . . .

**13 They are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**

**14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**

**15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works**

6. I trust that when I mark a man or movement as something to take note of and avoid, you will understand that I do so not out of arrogance or a desire to be controversial, but because the scripture here commands me to
7. As God has given me that father's heart, I want to protect the flock
  - a. I want to keep you united to Christ
  - b. I want to remove the doctrinal obstacles and deceitful trip wires the devil has put before your feet to trip you up and send you sprawling into error and ruin
8. And if in doing that, others leaders in the county then consider *me* to be hindering the Unity of the Church, well, so be it--I can only do what my

boss says

### **E. How To Deal With Error**

1. Paul gives a two-fold prescription for dealing with heresy here  
First = *MARK* those who promote error  
Second = *AVOID* them
2. The word *avoid* means to stay out of the way
3. No doubt Paul means this both literally and figuratively
  - a. once a person has been marked as a heretic, they should be avoided
    - 1) fellowship and communion with them should be broken off
    - 2) they need to see that their error is not tolerated and clinging to it places them outside the pall of orthodoxy
  - b. but certainly Paul means this figuratively as well
    - 1) in other word, we should stay out of their *WAY*
    - 2) they have left *THE WAY*, and gone their own *WAY*
    - 3) we must avoid their *WAY* and remain true to Him who is *THE WAY*  
= JESUS!

### **F. The Motive of Heretics**

1. You know, you have to wonder why a person would forsake the goodness and grace and truth of God for some pet error
2. Paul tells us why in verse 18

**{18} 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.**

3. There it is; there's the motive of false teachers
  4. As with every other sin, it is the motive of *self* that lies at the bottom and root of their error
  5. Make no mistake, no matter how much the false teacher mouths the name of Jesus, they are not serving Him
  6. They are serving themselves and their own ends
  7. They may look good, sound good, they may even smell good
  8. But watch closely and you will see that really, they are promoting themselves
    - a. the name of Jesus is nothing but a tool to fashion themselves a comfortable place
    - b. the power of God is but a technique to carve out some influence
  9. But oh, they are so slick!
    - a. and this is why they are often so successful
    - b. they are masters manipulators of words
    - c. and they know how to tap in to people's desires and expectations and milk them for all they're worth
    - d. they are able to draw out people's secret passions and sprinkle some religious terms over them and thus sanctify them
  10. And because far too many people are not being given a steady and wholesome diet of the whole counsel of God, when they hear these smooth and flattering words, they are seduced
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11. When loading trucks at UPS some years ago, I got in to a conversation with the guy across the belt from me
  - a. while he wasn't a Christian and didn't attend church anywhere, he did occasionally watch religious TV shows
  - b. he asked what I thought of a particular teacher who was on on Sunday mornings
  - c. now, the man he referred to is a heretic of the first order
  - d. so as tactfully as I could I said that while he certainly was an effective communicator, he was teaching things that were not Biblical
  - e. when he pressed me to explain what I meant, I eventually had to say that the man was a heretic
  - f. this sent him into spasms of laughter
  - g. when I asked what was so funny, he said that I was just jealous because I didn't have as many people at my church as he did at his
  - h. he said that in his mind, the fact that this false teacher was so successful and had amassed such a huge following and so much money was proof that God was blessing him and that he was teaching the truth
12. Is success in gaining a big following proof of the blessing of God?
  - a. is the amount of the collection proof of being right?
  - b. No
13. And yet I have heard this same justification used by mislead Christians as they seek support this or that false teacher
14. Success with man does not equate with Faithfulness to God

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *How Do We Know What Error Is?*

1. The challenge in all of this is: How do we discern error?
2. How can we know if something someone is teaching is right or wrong?
3. The answer to that important question is right here in verse 17

**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them—**

4. The only way we can know error as error is if we know what is true
5. Listen, there is an endless potential for error and there is no way we can prepared for it by trying to figure out all the ways false teachers can spread their heresies
6. But we can give ourselves to be so familiar with the truth, that when something else is taught, we'll see it for what it is
7. When I worked in fast food, I counted a lot of money
  - a. and I got pretty good at handling cash after 13 years
  - b. I could sort and count a stack of bills pretty quickly
  - c. I got so used to the feel of real money, that I could sense a counterfeit bill easily
  - d. and in all the years I worked there, I only had 2, both 20's
  - e. I found them both while counting money
  - f. though my finger grasped them for just an instant, I knew they were

- wrong, and stopped and looked at them more closely
8. Friend, don't worry about studying all the cults and heresies that threaten the church
  9. Just become so comfortable and familiar with the truth that when error comes, it will be obvious by it's feel, by the way it grates on the Spirit of Truth who dwells in you
  10. Then, because you know the truth, you'll know how to answer error

## **B. A Warning**

1. Jesus warned that the last days would be marked by wide spread deception
2. If we are in those last days, as all the evidence seems to suggest, then we need to take Paul's words of exhortation to heart with extra diligence
3. If we fail in this regard, then the Church stands in danger of being led into gross error
4. If we lose our grip on truth, then quite frankly, we will lose the ability to reach a lost a dying world with the gospel
5. We recently moved in to a new home
  - a. a big problem with ants
  - b. a lot outside - so I used some garden and yard insecticide
  - c. that drove them indoors!
  - d. got some little ant traps
  - e. put them at a couple spots and the rest on a shelf in the garage
  - f. the traps work like this:
    - 1) potent smelling food the ants love is wrapped around a tasteless poison
    - 2) the workers snap it up and carry it back to the nest where they feed it to the queen
    - 3) she dies and stops producing workers
    - 4) then eventually the whole colony dies of starvation
  - g. well, the colony under our house went for the box on the shelf
  - h. for a whole day they ravenously took the tainted food
  - i. and we haven't had an ant problem in the house since
6. That is how it is with false doctrine
7. Those who lack discernment import it into the heart of the church, thinking it nothing but really exciting new stuff
8. But it is poison that will steal away the life of genuine faith