

ROMANS 12-16: Putting Your Faith into Action

Why Did Paul Save This Warning for the End?

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Hey guys, this is Brett Clemmer, and we're here at the Man in the Mirror Bible Study. I'm so glad that you've joined us for the final episode in our series on the book of Romans. We're going to be looking at Romans 16, the last half of the last chapter of Romans. So we'll start with verse 17 and we'll go through verse 27.

Now, if you've been with us for this whole series, you know that Paul has sort of written this epic book, this epic letter to the church in Rome, really laying out much of the basis of our theology, much of the doctrine that we in the church today sort of explains a lot of our belief in the church today. He was a disciple of Jesus. He was an apostle. He met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul says that he spent time interacting with Jesus before he started his ministry.

And so Paul really comes to us with a great air of authority. He was a very learned man, a very well-educated man. He was a man who invested in other men. We see this from all of the greetings that he sends to and from people. Of course, Timothy and Titus being two of those that were very near and dear to Paul's heart.

And so we arrive at the end of Romans and Paul as usual gives us an ending that reminds us of the important parts of what he has said so far. And he actually saves a warning for the end. And so that's our question today. Why did he save this warning for the end, and what does it mean to us as we consider Romans and as we consider life as a Christian man following Christ?

I'm going to read the last half of this chapter and then we'll pray. And then we'll jump into our study together. Romans 16 verses 17 to 27.

"I appeal to you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all so that I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ be with you."

"Timothy, my fellow worker greets you. So do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus greet you."

"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God. Be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen."

Let's pray. Well, father, we just pray that you would open our hearts and minds to this passage, that you would teach us, Lord, through the power of your spirit what Paul was communicating to us through the inspiration of that same Holy Spirit. Lord, that we would understand how you want us to apply these principles into our own lives so that we can follow you more closely, so that we can live a life of obedience that comes from faith, Lord. And so that we can bring you glory Lord and build your Kingdom. In Jesus name, amen.

Well, why did Paul say this warning until the end? That's our title. And let me show you the three things that we're going to talk about in this passage during this session. First of all, we're going to look at the first few verses, and our first two points are going to be about the warnings and the tests that these first set of verses, this sort of warning section of this passage gives to us. The warnings and then the tests. And then we'll take a little brief side road and we'll talk about all those people that Paul sent greetings from, but then we'll come back to the last set of verses is our third point. And we're going to talk about this doxology. It's typically called a doxology and why Paul put this here and what the content of that doxology is.

And then if you'll indulge me for just a little bit after that, I want to just do a brief sort of overview. Just two quick points that I think of the many points that Paul brings up, of the many themes that Paul brings up in Romans, one or two of them that might have a particular importance for us today as Christian men following Christ.

WARNINGS

So let's look at first, the warnings that Paul gives to the church in Rome. And if you look at this passage, I want you to notice what I would call sort of the emphatic verbs in this passage. So he says, "I appeal to you brothers to watch out," he says, "for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you've been taught. Avoid them." So here's two emphatic verbs framing this first sentence, watch out and avoid them.

And so his warning here is to be vigilant, to be on guard. First Corinthians 16:13, Paul starts that off with, "Be on your guard, be on the lookout for," and what does he want you to be on the lookout for? He wants you to look out for people that are causing divisions. So in other words, they're coming in with relational breaks. They're pitting people against each other. We see that today maybe in things like denominations and some of the wars that I've seen on blogs where these guys with different, very technical theological points, they believe that their theological point is so important that they will insult a brother who doesn't agree with them exactly to every jot and tittle. They're causing divisions. And keep in mind Paul's talking to the church here. He's not talking to the general public. And so look out for people that are causing divisions. Look out for people in your church that are causing divisions, in your community that are causing divisions.

And the other thing that they might be doing is creating obstacles. And so what Paul is talking about here is the gospel is clear. It's straightforward. And it's simple. In fact, we'll talk about that in a little bit about how clear and simple and straightforward the gospel is. And so if somebody is creating obstacles, if somebody's keeping others... Maybe they're saying, "Well, you need to clean your life up a little bit before you can follow Christ. You need to not speak the way you speak, or you need to stop that behavior that you're stopping before you can have a relationship with Christ." That's not the gospel. That's creating an obstacle or maybe even misleading people.

And then he actually gives a little bit more of an explanation of that. And when he says, "Such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites." So why are these people doing this? To serve themselves. So somebody might cause division. So they may create obstacles, make the gospel more complicated than it is or create artificial barriers before a man and God or a woman and God.

Why are they doing it? Well, they're doing it for their own appetite. And the word here is belly actually. For their own bellies. So it's like they're hungry for attention or importance maybe. They're not humble. They're full of hubris. And so they want to have the focus on them. And so how do they do that? He says, "Well, they do it by smooth talk and flattery." I asked them guys the other day, when I say smooth talk and flattery, what kind of people do you think of? And I had already written three things down, three words down, and don't you know it, those guys said exactly the same thing that I said. They said politicians, that was my first one. Salesmen was my second. And televangelists was my third. These are people with smooth talk and flattery who were only trying to make themselves feel more important.

And so how are they doing that? Well, they're causing division. Why would they do that? So that they can sort of whisper in someone's ear and they can take sides and people can rely on them, or they put obstacles in the way of the gospel so that they can be the person who has the right to approve or disapprove somebody's access to the gospel.

That's evil. That's not righteous in any way, shape, or form. And so what do you do? "You watch out," Paul says, "and you avoid them, keep away from them, separate yourself from them." Remember, Paul talks early in Romans 13:10 that love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. These people do not have love.

So there's the negative. Watch out and avoid. But then later on in the next couple of verses he says a positive warning. Like this is what you should do. And so listen to this, "For your obedience is known to all so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent, to what is evil." Or one commentator, Phillips said, "You could translate this as I want you to be experts in doing good and not even a beginner in what is evil."

So be an expert, guys, in doing good, being wise and good, and then innocent and evil. Have integrity at all times. So that the things that you say you believe in are exhibited through your behavior. You are obedient because of the faith that you have.

So those are the warnings. And then just a quick point here. He says, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Now Paul loves Genesis three. He loves to talk about the fall, the creation and the fall. And so this is from Genesis where he's talking about... He says to the serpent, he promises the serpent the seed of woman will crush you under his heel. And this is a prophecy about Jesus. But Paul is even saying that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. So he'll use us as an instrument to crush Satan as well. But what a great promise to have from God through Paul and the gospel that he's preaching here. So if these are the warnings, watch out and keep away from people who cause division and create obstacles and then be a man of integrity, be wise in what is good and innocent and what is evil.

TESTS

Then this leads to three tests. Three tests that we can use when we're trying to determine if something is from God or not. And I got this from John Stott's wonderful commentary on Romans. Again, I think I've talked about this a few times. If you want a great commentary on Romans, go buy John Stott's, Romans. It's just called Romans. And here's the three tests that Dr. Stott pulls out of this passage that I think is fantastic.

So he says, "Be aware of or watch out for those who create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. So the first question you should always ask is, is it biblical?" It's a great test for if you're trying to figure out if something is from God or not. Is it biblical? If somebody's giving you a teaching and it's contrary to scripture, it's not good. If it's not biblical, then it doesn't pass the test that Paul's giving us here.

And then he says, "Such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites." So the second test is does it glorify Christ or does it glorify themselves? If someone is teaching you and they're putting

themselves above others, especially above God, then you need to be wary of that person. You need to watch out and keep away from them if they are promoting themselves, their own reputation above the reputation of Christ. And we see this today in the church, unfortunately. We see some preachers and teachers and writers out there who are exalting themselves over Christ. That's a test that they are flunking. "Watch out for those people and stay away from them," Paul says.

And then finally he says, "Your obedience is known to all. So I rejoice over you. I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent to what is evil." So here's the next question then, does it promote goodness? Does a teaching that you're hearing or a lesson that you're learning or a thought that you have, does it promote goodness? That's a great test to determine whether something is from God.

Now, listen, I want to tell you that it really has to pass all three of these tests. Something could sound biblical and sound like it's giving glory to God and yet it's not. It doesn't have any fruit. It's not promoting goodness. You should question that. Or something seems like it's having a really good impact, a really good... It's very fruitful and yet it's not really glorifying Christ. And actually it's actually counter to the teachings of the Bible. Well then that doesn't pass the test either. You need to watch out for those things and stay away. Those are people that are causing divisions, creating obstacles. They are trying to make you wise to evil, not wise to what is good and innocent to what is evil.

So there you go. There's three warnings. Watch out, keep away, and be wise in good and innocent in evil. And there's three tests. Is it biblical? Does it glorify Christ? And does it promote goodness?

So that brings us from verse 17 to 20. In 21, 22 and 23, Paul is sending greetings from people that are with him. You'll remember in the first half of this chapter, he's sending greetings to people. This time he's sending greetings from people that are with him.

And I'll just point out a couple of them. Obviously, Timothy, my fellow worker, that's basically saying Timothy is right alongside him. He loves Timothy. Considers him his spiritual son, as we know, from the letters to Timothy. And then Lucius Jason and Sosipater. When he says kinsman, he probably means people that are from the same place that he's from. Tertius. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. You might be thinking, "I thought Paul wrote this letter." Well, Paul did write the letter, but it was very common in these days for the letter writer to dictate the letter to like a secretary or someone who was a good writer basically, a good penmanship. And that was the way they made their living. And so Tertius is the person that took the dictation and then wrote the letter for Paul. It was a very important role because he would probably interact a little bit with Paul as he was writing, making sure that he was getting the words exactly the way Paul wanted them and that Paul was saying what he wanted to say.

And then Gaius who is host to me in the whole church. That means this house was big enough not only for Paul to stay with him, but for the whole church to meet there. And then Erastus who's the city treasurer. So here you have a wealthy man. You have a government official, and then Quartus the city... And then our brother Quartus may have been Tertius' brother, may have just been a brother in the church.

And so you see this little group of men that Paul has gathered around him. And guys, there's a little side lesson here for us. It's good to have a group of guys around you that are supporting you and playing different roles for you and your own ministry, in your own Christian life to help you fulfill what God has called you to.

DOXOLOGY

Well, the third section here that starts with verse 25 and goes to verse 27 in most of your Bibles it will say doxology over this section. And so let me read this to you.

"Now, to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. According to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith." Remember that phrase. "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen."

So why did Paul write this at the end? Well really this is sort of a recap of many of the themes that have been all throughout Romans that Paul wants to draw your attention to.

So I'm starting at the very beginning. "Now to him who is able to strengthen you." This word able is the word dynamism. It's the same word that we get dynamite and dynamic from. And he's talking about the power of God. This is a theme throughout scripture, throughout Romans, the power of God. And Paul is emphasizing this. If you look at Romans 1:16, Paul says that the gospel is the power of God. And so that's the first theme that Paul is emphasizing in the doxology.

The second theme that he's emphasizing as he talks about, "To my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery." And so this gospel of Christ, in Romans 10, Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth, that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." And before I was talking about people that put obstacles in the way of the gospel. Guys, this is the gospel. If you confess with your mouth, in other words, if you live out the life of a Christian because you believe in your heart that Jesus rose from the dead. That's the gospel. Don't allow anybody else to add anything to that.

There are going to be a lot of outflows from that. This obedience that comes from faith and you're going to succeed and you're going to fail. You're going to obey God and you're going to disobey God. But if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. You're willing to take a stand for Jesus being Lord. Paul says that's it. That's the simple thing that you need to do to be saved. That is the good news, the gospel. And so Paul is emphasizing this in this doxology.

And then he talks about the mystery. He says the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed. And through the prophetic writings has been made known. Guys, the Jews were looking for the Messiah. There was this mystery of how God was going to redeem the world. Adam and Eve sinned. And they were fallen and the world goes through this groaning for the return of God. There's this mystery. How was God going to redeem his people? How is God going to reconcile us to himself? Jesus is the answer to that mystery. That's what Paul is saying all throughout Romans. That because of Jesus, the mystery assault, how we can be reconciled with God, how creation can be redeemed.

And then in this next part, he talks about who's this mystery been made known to? Who is the gospel for? Well, it's for all nations. For all nations. Now this is a big deal. Paul's speaking to the church in Rome. It was probably started by the Jewish Christians. Then the Jews got kicked out of Rome. So the people that the Gentiles that lived in Rome that had been converted to Christianity were then took over the leadership, and then the Jews were allowed back in. And so you've got this conflict. There's a cultural background differences, religious background differences, probably ethnic background differences. And they had to reconcile. And there were some Jews that thought that Jesus was for the Jews. He was the Jews' Messiah. So the only people that he was really there to save were Jews.

So you had to convert to Judaism so that you could convert to Christianity. And Paul teaches against this over and over again. "This is not," he says, "what the gospel is. The gospel is for all nations." And this hearkens back to remember Jesus and the great commission says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." And if you look at the Old Testament, all throughout the Old Testament, the prophets over and over again talk about Gentiles being part of God's kingdom. And the Jews just don't want to see it.

They're God's chosen people. They don't want to see that there's anybody outside of themselves. And aren't we like that too sometimes? We think that people have to look like us and talk like us and read the same version of the Bible that we read. And they have to be just like us in order to be a part of the kingdom. But God says and Paul says, here, that's not what the gospel is about. It's for everyone. Everyone who would believe in the gospel.

And then he wraps it up with this, "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ." And so this is where Paul is just praising God's wisdom. And you can go look at Romans 11:33 to see Paul's just wonder at God's knowledge and his power and how much he is just in awe of God. And so he is praising God's wisdom.

Now, if you go back to the end of verse 26, there's this phrase, "To bring about the obedience of faith." "To bring about the obedience of faith." And I want to talk about that here as we wrap up. You could go into Romans... You could spend a long time in Romans and you could do like a word study. You could pick a word a week. You could pick justification one week and law another week and sin another weekend and grace another week and faith another week. You could pick a word a week, and you could just go through with a concordance and look up that word in Romans and find all the verses that use that word.

And you could over the course of weeks, you could build a really strong theological understanding of what Paul's teaching. And I would encourage you to do that. That's a great thing to do. All of those words you'll realize are themes throughout Romans, but there's two themes that I want to talk about that really have to do with you and me as Christian men.

And the first one is this phrase, "Obedience from faith." "Obedience from faith." Now, now we all know what obedience is, but what does from faith mean? Well, think about all the things that could cause you to be obedient. You could be obedient from knowledge. You know some things, so you behave in a way that's consistent with that knowledge. You could be obedient from obligation. Like you're obligated to do the right thing and so you do it. You could be obedient like in a job. You might be obedient from obligation to a job. You're not really excited about what you're being asked to do, but you do it because you feel obligated to it. You have obedience from fear. Like I don't want to get a ticket, so I'm going to obey the traffic laws. You could be from coercion. You could be forced to do something, or maybe you're in the military and you have to follow orders. That might not be the best definition of coercion, but you might just feel like you have to do something. That's why your obedient.

Right or wrong, might not be a wrong thing that you're doing. It might be a right thing you're doing, but where the obedience is coming from is from these other places. But that's not what God asks us for. God asks us for obedience from faith. Faith.

What does faith really come down to? Well, faith really comes down to this. Do you believe that God is who he says he is? And will you trust him that what he wants for you is what's best? If you believe that he is who he says he is and if you trust him, then you will obey him out of faith, not out of fear or knowledge or obligation or coercion, but out of faith. I believe God is God. I believe that he wants the best for me. I'm putting my faith in God. And so I'm going to obey the things that God calls me to do. And that's the life of a Christian, guys, is being obedient from faith. That's how we should think about living our lives.

The second theme that I think is in all throughout Romans is, and this is I don't think nearly as obvious a theme, although it is pretty prevalent. And that is the theme of unity. Remember we talked about, you have this church in Rome that had gone through upheaval and groups leaving and groups coming back. And we see that today with denominations and racial differences and economic differences and nationality differences. This is all inside of the church. You see groups from one area of the world

arguing with groups from other areas of the world within the same denomination because their theology is not the same.

You see people who feel like because of their economic situation are not treated the same in their church, violating James two, teaching on partiality. And you see that with race too. People that are not treated while inside the church because of their race or don't treat other people as Jesus would treat them because of their race or their economic background or their nationality. Maybe they don't speak English very well. Maybe they're a brand new Christian. So they treat the new Christians... They don't treat them with unity. They sort of treat them as second class citizens.

When I think of unity in the church, it's fascinating because I've told some friends this before, but I think I've learned a lot about discipleship from my fraternity in college. And I went to a small college outside of Boston. And I like to say I majored in fraternity and got a degree in psychology while I was there. But I learned a lot about discipleship and about brotherhood, about unity from our fraternity because these were guys we had a shared set of values in our fraternity manuals and teachings. We had shared activities. We did community service together. We hung out together. We studied together. We did recreational things together. We had a great time, and we spent a lot of that time together.

But when I look at my fraternity brothers, most of them weren't like me. There were guys from different economic backgrounds, guys from different racial backgrounds. There were guys who had completely different worldviews than I did. A lot of unbelievers. I was one of the few Christians in my fraternity. But we were brothers. And when one brother had a problem, when one brother had a challenge, the other brothers rallied around that brother. They put their own interests aside for a time and they rallied around the brother that needed help. And I experienced that myself in my fraternity. When I went through a difficult time, my brothers rallying around me, putting their own needs to the side for the moment so that they could meet mine. And this is unity.

This is unity in the body is when we're willing to place others' needs above our own. That's love, guys. I learned love from fraternity brothers, and I want us to experience that in the church as well, which brings us to the Big Idea.

And so our Big Idea is this: **In Romans, we are called to obedience motivated by faith and unity rooted in brotherhood.**

And so that's my prayer for you as we wrap up this series on Romans. I hope you'll go back and listen to some of the lessons that maybe that you missed, listen to the podcast, or watch the videos. Maybe that you'll go back through Romans and do this word study that we talked about with all those different great words that you could walk through Romans with.

But at the end of the day, I hope you get this: That in Romans, we are called to obedience motivated by faith and unity rooted in brotherhood.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this great man Paul. Thank you for the book that he wrote, the letter that he wrote to the church in Rome. And thank you for preserving that for us to read today, Lord. Would you help us to take the lessons that Paul was teaching the church and Rome and apply those lessons into our own life and into the church today, Lord. Would you help us, father, to have such strong faith that our obedience is motivated by that faith and to love each other so well that our unity is rooted in our brotherhood? In Jesus name, amen.

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