

Sermon Growth Guide

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LOVING AND WISE | Romans 16:17-23

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Key Verse: Romans 16:19. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

Big Idea: Divisiveness and conflict can destroy the friendships of Believers. They betray the beauty of the church community. We must be both wise to what's harmful and innocent of harm.

Foundations

Beginning in v17, Paul makes an abrupt change in the flow of his letter. Aware of conflicts within the Roman church, he returns to his teaching on unity and love.

Paul urges the Roman church to "watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way ." Was he referring to Jews who desired stricter adherence to the Mosaic Law, Gentile believers who struggled to embrace moral constraints, or agitators seeking to destroy the church. These factions steered others from the "teaching they had learned." They served their own agenda, not the purpose of Christ. Today we still struggle with legalism, the acceptance of promiscuous lifestyles, corruption, and hostilities between members of the same church.

After encouraging his readers, "Everyone has heard about your obedience" Paul goes on to say, I want you to be aware of what is harmful and to be harmless in your own actions. I want you to be wise about evil and blameless (innocent) of doing evil. Jesus tells us to be shrewd snakes. Peter says be watchful, the devil prowls like a roaring lion.

In his unusual benediction in v20, Paul promises the God of Peace will utterly defeat Satan and until that time, the grace of Jesus will keep you. God is sovereign even in our trouble.

Paul begins Roman 16 by asking the Roman church to greet his dear friends. At the end of this section, a different set of friends greet the Roman church. The Church: One body made up of Jews and gentiles, women and men, free and enslaved, wealthy and poor united in the love of Christ Jesus. Threatened but never defeated.

Understanding God's Word

Read Romans 1:8, 16:17-23 and for background Acts 18:2-4. Luke explains that in Corinth Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla who were exiled by the Roman Emperor Claudius in 49AD. According to the historian Suetonius, this ruling was the result of conflicts in the Jewish synagogues regarding Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Paul commends the Roman church for their obedience. Read Romans 12: 9-21 for Paul's beautiful description of what obedience looks like.

Applying God's Word

We survived a contentious, divisive and ugly political season. Pastor Tim asks, "How do we keep a community healthy and united?" Forgiveness was his answer. Discuss why forgiveness matters. Is there someone you need to forgive or to ask forgiveness of? Are you privy to subtle divisions in the church? How can you bring unity? (For personal reflection: Does Jesus call you by name?)

Witnessing God's Word

A new command I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. by this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34 Greet one another. Introduce yourself. Welcome the stranger. Walk them to the Belonging Booth. Invite them to coffee in The Commons. Witness by your love. Build unity.