

Warning Against False Teachers

📖 Romans 16:17-20

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Q & A from Previous Weeks

Q: Would you mind sharing what ministries you have found that support Messianic Jews?

A: Sure. This relates back to Romans 15:25-27. In these verses Paul taught that saved Gentiles are indebted to saved Jews because salvation is of the Jews and yet very few organizations funnel evangelical giving to saved Jews. It's usually done generally and it comes under the auspices of the rabbinic Jews who oppose believing Jews and make sure not one dime gets to them. In my research I evaluated 21 different ministries that claim to support the Jewish people in some way. This is not all of them but all the major ones. When you look at these you have to go through all the nuts and bolts of these ministries, including their doctrine, fiscal responsibility, overhead, administration, and what percentage actually makes it to the Jews. This is a matter of Christian responsibility to know who you are giving money to and what they are doing with it. As is normally the case, the number of ministries even worth considering is very small, others are virtually worthless and some are ripping you off. If you give to some organization that claims to help the Jews, you may not actually be giving to them or supporting them in the way you want. That is why the elders here handle a lot of this by researching who we support, which amounts to ~15% of our annual budget. These missions are highlighted every month in the bulletin so you can research them yourselves and see where our money is going. I've divided them into several groups.

General Aid (Gen 12:3)

- *Friends of Israel* – solid materials, helping Jews in general
- *Bridges for Peace* – secure state of Israel
- *Jerusalem Prayer Team* – prayer for Israel and humanitarian aid
- *Vision for Israel* – humanitarian aid

Evangelism of Jews (Romans 11:11, 13-15)

- *Chosen People Ministries* – clear gospel on website
- *Jews for Jesus* – clear gospel on website
- *Dugit Messianic Ministries* – no clear statement of gospel on website
- *One for Israel* – no clear statement of gospel on website. Many materials for cutting edge evangelism
- *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ)* – Rabbi Eckstein pulls in \$600,000+ annual salary and is not even a believer. Often teaches the Bible, and Christians are duped into thinking he is a believer.
- *Christians United for Israel (CUFI)* – John Hagee (political lobbying only; no money goes to Israel)
- *Christian Friends of Israel-Jerusalem* – declined financial report
- *Jewish Voice Ministries International* (also with MJB) – sign gifts still operational
- *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem* – social gospel, love and comfort only
- *Eagles Wings Ministries* - charismatic
- *American Friends of Leket Israel*
- *Holy Land Community*
- *Messianic Jewish Alliance of America* – seems okay on the gospel

Discipleship

- *Ariel Ministries* – Fruchtenbaum (teaching the Bible from a Jewish perspective)

Messianic Jews (Romans 16:24-27)

- *Maoz Israel Ministries* – definitely aware of the situation on the ground for Messianic Jews
- *Messianic Jewish Israel Fund (MJIF)* - <1/10 of 1% of money Christians give reaches Messianic Jews in Israel
- *The Israel Project (My Firstborn Son)* – reaches out to Jewish believers in the land of Israel. Supports seminary at Netanya.

Q: Jesus called men and sent them out in twos. Isn't that the norm?

A: This came out because we talked about how all these people in Rom 16 were involved in some way in Paul's ministry. Jesus' sending out men two-by-two was a practice, not a principle. It's not required that we follow practices. At other times Jesus and the Twelve ministered in a group. In the same way, the early church selected seven deacons, that's a practice, not a principle. We are not required to have seven deacons. We can have as many as are needed that are qualified.

Q: Romans 16, single women in the ministry seems peculiar.

A: This is coming out of the seven women mentioned by name in Rom 16, some of whom appear single. It's important to understand that "ministry" is not a technical word for some kind of vocation. It's probably a very misused word in Western Christianity. The word "ministry" just means "service." Every believer is responsible to serve. Some think the spiritual gifts are ministries. I essentially agree with that. Eph 4:11-12 uses the word "ministry" in this sense when it says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (i.e. ministry), to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." 1 Cor 12:5 uses the word to describe the three aspects of spiritual gifts saying, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." So it seems that we minister in terms of our spiritual gifts and since all believers have a spiritual gift or gifts then single women are to minister within their gift.

Another thing to clarify is that we're not talking about an office like elder or deacon. The offices seem reserved for men since Paul lays down the qualifications for these offices and they both relate to men. Another thing to understand is that pastor is not an office but a spiritual gift. So a pastor is not necessarily an elder. No passage teaches that a pastor is an elder. Pastor is a gift and elder is an office. Since pastor is a gift I maintain that a woman can have this gift and that many do exercise the function of pastoring women in the flock. It has the essential idea of caring for others. But again, the concept of pastor is so distorted in Western Christianity that if you say a woman can have the gift of pastor they will freak out. There's no reason to freak out. The Bible is quite plain on these issues and does not confuse offices and gifts and functions... So I see no problem with single women ministering. We all have spiritual gifts and when we use them we are ministering.

Today's Lesson

Today we come to Romans 16:17 and here we read **Now I urge you**. The Greek word is *παρακαλεω* and means "I encourage, I exhort, I urge." It is the word for a friend coming alongside of you and encouraging you to go in a specific direction. Here Paul is pictured as more than a friend because he addresses them as **brethren**. This is sibling terminology. It's used throughout the NT for the Church. We are all siblings because we have all been born of the same womb, born of God and in the family of God. So this exhortation is coming from a fellow sibling, the apostle Paul. And what is Paul urging us as his fellow siblings to do? To **keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them**. This is so common as Paul begins to sign off. Before he signs off he warns against false teachers. False teaching

can come from outside or from inside. This warning seems to be against false teachers within the assembly. False teaching is always a danger.

In this warning he urges us strongly to **keep our eye on** certain people. Note that, the Greek word is *σκοπεω* from which we get “scope” as in a microscope or telescope. It’s the idea of focusing on an object and watch closely. And note who we are to watch closely. **Those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned.** So there are two things to watch for and the standard by which you are to judge which is the teaching you have learned. We’ll make this directly applicable to us so we get the real take away. The first thing we are watching closely for is **those who cause dissensions.** **Dissensions** is the Greek word *διχοστασια* and means one who is “factious in their opposition.” They oppose what is being taught here. They hear me teach something and they reject it. Rather than come talk about it and look at the text together and solve it on the basis of scripture they start murmuring. These people are factions. They murmur to identify people who might join them. So it’s all kind of hush, hush for a while as they try to identify people that would join their small group. This is a formula for disaster. The same word is used in Gal 5:20 as a deed of the flesh so these people are operating according to the flesh. You are to keep your eye on these people and don’t fall into their trap. The second thing we are watching closely for is **those who cause hindrances.** This is the Greek word *σκανδαλον* which refers to “a stumbling block.” These people are trying to cause you to stumble into sin by setting a trap for you. They are trying to get you to act contrary to what is being taught here, which would be sin. They entice you to sin.

So you are to watch for factious people, those who oppose what is being taught here, and for stumbling blocks, those who try to get you to live contrary to what is taught here. You will notice that **the things you have learned** is the standard and that is the word of God. We teach the word of God here in a unique way known as content-rich exegesis; it involves repetition, Greek and Hebrew words with their transliteration. This is not the traditional way the word of God is taught. Traditionally the sermon has three or four points maximum and the points are memorable either by alliteration or some other device. You only want your audience to get one main point. That is not the way we teach here and the reason is because we don’t think that the traditional way gets it done. We think that digging in and working through texts carefully and repetitively is the best way to teach the word of God and that you will learn more and be stronger believers. So the point here is that what you learn here is the standard by which you are judging whether someone is factious or a stumbling block.

And if you suspect someone is then you are to keep a close eye on them. You are not to give them a free pass. I don’t give them a free pass. I know who they are right now and they are always on my radar because I look at this congregation as my responsibility. What did Paul say to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:28? “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God...savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert.” I am always on the

alert and there are people here who I am skeptical of because they don't seem to be tuning into the doctrine and there are books that are read among you that I have objections to. That's one of the problems with the printing press, there are so many books and so many ideas that are in the air, that books themselves have become a major source of false doctrine, same thing with the radio but more so with books. All those authors that write those books are possible false teachers. And if I am to follow Paul's command I am to be on the alert about the content. And I am on the alert. There are things in the books that go around here that are contrary to what you have learned here. I'm hoping that you are able to read critically because there is no other way for a Christian to read. I am calling you to be discerning when you read these books and never, never read a book without laying it side by side with Scripture and making Scripture the authoritative judge of the book. Scripture alone is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, all sufficient word of God. Books come and go but the word of God stands forever. We are living in times that the authority of the word of God and sound doctrine is not taken very seriously. Paul warned that the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." I think that most books fit this category and Christians are turning their ears away from the truth and turning aside to myths in these books. So if you are going to read books and have book clubs, I enjoin you to read every book with a critical eye, next to the Bible, that is the only way to read as a Christian. Otherwise you will suck up myths. Colossians 2:18 says you will be defrauded if you do not take every thought captive to Jesus Christ.

So I'm keeping my eye out for this but I wonder if you are. Verse 16 says keep your eye on those who introduce opposing teaching here. Now if you identify people who are introducing contrary teaching what are you supposed to do? **Turn away from them.** The word is *εκκλινω* and means "steer clear of, keep away from, avoid." You are to avoid these people. They are dangerous to you and to his congregation. The local church is very important and to allow voices within that are not the voice of the teaching here is only going to cause problems. So when you detect them you are to steer clear of them.

Now we come to verse 18 and Paul explains why you are to avoid them? **For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites.** Alright, they're out for themselves, ultimately. The word **slaves** means they are given over to the power of something and that something here **is not our Lord Christ but...their own appetites.** They are **slaves...of their own appetites.** The word **appetites** is a food word, it means "belly" and the picture is they are trying to satisfy their urges. They are hungry for you to follow after them and their teachings. Your attention to them feeds them, feeds their ego.

Now, don't think that their appetite is so easily detected because Paul says next that they are very smooth and flattering. It's **by their smooth and flattering speech that they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.** It's not obvious. It's more like how Satan operates. Paul says in 2 Cor that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. He looks good and kind and righteous but it's a deception. I think most Christian artists that have depicted Satan

have depicted him as a red monster with horns and a pitchfork. That is unfortunate because the true depiction of him is as an angel gleaming in brightness, radiant in glory, beautiful to the eye of the beholder. We wonder, actually, if Eve was taken in by his beauty in Gen 3 because the word translated serpent can mean something gleaming, bright. Well, the people among us who are false teachers and would introduce us to false teaching are like Satan. They appear like nice, beautiful people. But they know how to manipulate and they are driven to manipulate because they have an appetite to satisfy. Paul says they use **smooth and flattering speech**. The word **smooth** means "plausible." It means they are able to make a fine speech. They can really communicate their position with effectiveness. Their arguments are well-crafted and reasonable and yet upon close inspection they are false. Don't be taken in because someone can really communicate, they often draw you into their life and then use all kinds of experiences so that you will be hesitant to reject these experiences as validations of their argument. That is a very subjective place you can be lured into. The other word is **flattering** and this word means "words well-chosen in a speech but untrue." In other words, it is a person who has false eloquence. The most successful false teachers are those who speak with eloquence. It sounds so good how could it not be true. They use big words in bigger sentences and it all sounds so advanced, but it is untrue. It is nothing more than what was once known as sophistry. This is what moves the masses, don't be moved by it.

Now the person at the end of the verse 18 is the one who is taken in by it. The **unsuspecting**. This word means "simple." The "simple" person is the one who does not evaluate very carefully. They do not read critically. They read for interest only. They are not really interested in truth. They are simply interested for interest sake. So when they read they do not follow verse 17. They do not sit there with their Bible open on one hand and this book or teaching of someone else on the other and say, now what does God say. They take for granted that the person or author is speaking truth. And they almost consider it a sin to question that.

Well, if that is you, you are **the unsuspecting** victim of a great many deceptions. You are being defrauded. This is the thing, there is one test, it is what does the word of God say? It doesn't matter how good it sounds, how nice the person is, how pretty an individual they are, how well they can speak or write. What matters is what the word of God says. And yet we live in a day and age when most Christians do not know much of the word of God, even here there are not many Christians who know much of this book. So how well do you think they are able to discern? Not very well. I still here people around here saying God told me to do this or God told me to do that. Friend, God did not tell you to do anything except what is in the word of God. It is not healthy to go around saying God told you to do this or do that. God is not now speaking outside of the Bible. Do you remember what the Bible says about this? Rev 22:18ff, "let no one add anything" to the text or else a curse will be on them. 1 Cor 13:9, "We know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes the partial will be done away." That is speaking about the canon of Scripture coming to completion. This happened almost 2000 years ago. The Bible is complete and we can see ourselves and the world perfectly through it. There is no need for God to say anything else. And to say that He did say something else is to say that the Bible is not what God says it to be. Well then, friend, you might as well just live on the basis of your experience because you have made your experience

or the experience of someone else your God. Do you know how high the word of God is as an authority? Ps 138:2 says that the word of God is even above His own name. Is that the way most people think of the authority of the word of God? I think not. Do you remember the passage where the rich man was in Sheol in great torment and the poor man was in paradise and the rich man said please send back the poor man to warn my five brothers? And what did Jesus say? They have Moses and the Prophets, let them read them. But no, the rich man said, if someone goes back from the dead, they will repent. But Jesus said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." Do you know what that is saying? That is saying that the word of God is above everyone's experience. It tells us how to interpret our experience. My experience, your experience is all subject to the interpretation of the word of God. All experiences are not valid. They are subject to Scripture and when you have a weird experience you are to subject that to Scripture and reject it. It is not valid. There are few Christians who can do that. That is because they worship themselves and their own experiences. They are greatly deceived. I deny such experiences and I have had some very interesting, strange things happen to me, but I do not entertain them as being from God. There are a great many evil deceivers in this world, human and demonic, and to go after these and discuss them is to say to God, I am bored with your word, your word is not enough to satisfy me. Well, Paul says, you are **the unsuspecting**. You need to be critical. Your minds need to be in this book every single day. And when you detect someone who is opposing this book, saying something strange, you need to steer clear of them.

Verse 19 is some explanation for why Paul is so opposed to false teaching even though the Romans were not, at this time, falling for false teaching. **For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.** At the time the **reports** were that they had not been taken in by any dangerous, smooth-talking, factious people. Instead they had been obedient. And because of that Paul was **rejoicing**. But Paul knew that every good thing comes to an end and so a warning is always timely. Did you know that the average seminary and church stays true to their original founding purpose and doctrine for about 75 years? There is a slow, doctrinal decay. Part of that is due to not keeping up with the satanic distortions that slip in. Satan never stops trying to distort the gospel and all other doctrines by nuancing a word this way, changing the meaning of a word that way, this has always been the case. When pastors and elders don't keep up with these changes they and their congregations fall prey to doctrinal distortion. That is why doctrinal statements should not be static documents but living documents in the sense that they are always being updated to clarify with respect to new and progressive doctrines.

Well, the Romans were obedient at this time, living according to the word of God but Paul wanted them **to be wise** or better, "skillful" with respect to **what is good, and innocent in what is evil**. The reason is because he knew there is always the danger of doctrinal deviation. Don't think that you are immune, that you have some kind of inoculation against it. There have been many, many Christians who have fallen prey to what is evil. If you think you can't fall prey to it then do you not think that your arrogance will not reveal that to Satan? He knows. And then what? You are an easy target. What did Paul say about these things? Watch closely your doctrine. Be

alert at all times. I want that for you, I want you to be skillful in what is good. The Christian life, following the text is a skill you have to learn and as you learn that you are innocent in what is evil, you stay far from it...because you know what you are here for, to learn loyalty to God through the text of the word of God.

Now in verse 20 what Paul is doing is bringing up the fact that Satan is now loose and not bound and that he is the one who is behind all deceptions of doctrine in Christianity. He has access to infiltrate in your life and my life and it may bring you to recall what Jesus said to Peter in Matt 16 when Jesus revealed that he was going to be killed and Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him, saying, "This will never happen to You!" and Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me Satan!" Satan had influenced Peter and Satan can influence you. He is alive and active and seeking to destroy you. I don't think Christians take this seriously enough. If they did I think they would spend more time learning to defend themselves by studying the word of God. I was listening the other day to an interview at DTS that was done in 2013. It was President Bailey interviewing Donald Campbell and Dwight Pentecost. He asked them, what is the one thread that has been at the core of the heritage of DTS and what is it that we as a school should never let go of. Pentecost answered, "The authority and the finality of the word of God. It's all sufficiency." He said, it's not a theology we're holding to, it's the book, what it says and what it means and its application. That's because if you don't know this book you are open to the influence of Satan. He will deceive you to the extent that you don't know or don't respect the authority of the word of God. So until verse 20, until he is crushed, you better be on your toes. Right now we're in a war.

But verse 20 is saying that a time is coming when **the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.** In other words, there is a day when the war will be over. There is a day when Satan will be crushed. That day has not yet come. The amillennialist likes to say that Satan is presently bound, that is imaginative thinking. If he was bound the world would have peace but the world does not have peace. When the world has peace that is when he will have been crushed and that is not until the kingdom comes, the kingdom on earth when Christ returns and reigns on the throne of David. Then we will have peace.

Until that time, **The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Grace**, that is what we need to be so wise as to follow verse 17 and keep your eye on those who are causing factions and who are stumbling blocks contrary to what you have learned here from the word of God, and when you identify them to turn away from them, avoid them, they are not a help to you. In v 18, such men may be believers but they are not living as slaves of Christ but of their own appetites; and they prey on the unsuspecting by plausible arguments and silk-lined addresses. It's corrupt, compare everything with Scripture. So in v 19 Paul stirred them up by way of reminder about false teachers even though at this time they were living in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. But in v 20 they must remain vigilant until the God of peace would crush Satan under our feet. And the basis of our vigilant pursuit of truth and distinguishing error is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.