

A Reflection on Paul's Defense of the Gospel in Romans and Its Implications for Separation

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

Text: **Romans 16:17–20** (NASB) ¶¹⁷ *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.* ¹⁸ *For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.* ¹⁹ *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.* ²⁰ *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.* ¶ *The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

Objective: It is important to be a consistent separatist, who can explain biblically why one would separate on certain issues. My objective is to provide some direction on how to reason biblically to separation issues from Romans.

Logic: **Premise 1:** Paul tells the Romans to “turn away from” those “who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned.”

Premise 2: Some of what the Romans will have learned comes from this letter of Paul to them.

Conclusion: Thus, Paul would tell the Romans to “turn away from” those “who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching” of Romans.

Certainly the key theme of Romans revolves around the gospel. Thus, those “who cause dissensions and hindrances” contrary to the gospel are to be separated from.

Let's try to work this out more particularly by noting what Paul says about the gospel in Romans and how we can apply what he says to the warning to “turn away from” those “who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned.”

Note: Romans 16:17–20 focuses our attention on apostates who intentionally seek to harm the church. Believers also may harm the church either by teaching incorrect doctrine or by living inconsistent lives. While the text we have cited deals only with apostates, Romans also gives us insight into issues where believers may harm the church.

Throughout this presentation I will make application of Romans to our topic. I will suggest that those who reject Paul's gospel message and all that it entails are "candidates for separation."

Some of these candidates are apostates. Some may be believers who have interpreted Paul's message incorrectly and/or are living inconsistently in a harmful way. For the first group separation is rejection of their claim to be "Christian" and a refusal to fellowship with them "religiously." For the second group separation is the refusal of entrance into the local assembly, or a removal from the local assembly if the local assembly believes the disagreement over interpretation or the inconsistent living is too critical, and there is no evidence of repentance.

While most of what I will say is obvious, my hope is to present a biblical basis from Romans for thinking through the issues of separation.

I. Identifying the Theme of Romans

Definition of theme: Prominent topic about which the author writes...main thing on author's mind. Subject frequently recurs and saturates writing. It is the "red thread" that sews the epistle together.

I believe the theme of Romans is clearly found in Romans 1:16–17. Paul is going to write about the gospel...and make three particular points. *First...* "it is the power of God for salvation" (v. 16). *Second...* "in it the righteousness of God is revealed" (v. 17). *Third...* it must be received by faith... "from faith to faith." So while I believe that the overall theme of Paul's epistle could be reduced to two words: *The Gospel*, I have tried to incorporate the three particular points Paul makes about the gospel in my "working" theme: "**God's Righteousness Revealed in the Gospel – Powerful to Save Believers.**"

Question to ponder: What does the gospel reveal about God's righteousness?

Answer: We will see that the gospel reveals that God is righteous in *giving* His righteousness through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 5:17) to miserable sinners who believe in Jesus Christ, because of the work Jesus Christ did for them.

II. Following the "Red Thread" (Theme) through Romans

A. Development of theme in introduction to letter – **Romans 1:1–7**

Paul identifies himself as "*set apart*" for the gospel of God (v. 1). The gospel's arrival had been promised by the prophets (v. 2). Its message concerned Jesus Christ's Person (v. 3) and work (v. 4). Its scope included the Gentiles, many of whom belonged to the Roman church (vv. 5–6).

The gospel had worked in Rome. Paul refers to his readers as "*saints*" (v. 7) and he is

thankful that their faith in the gospel is known all over the ancient world (v. 8). As a result Paul wants to come to Rome, himself, in order to strengthen the believers there and to preach the gospel to the unsaved that others may be added to the church (vv. 9–15, esp. v. 15).

Paul is “*eager to preach the gospel*” in Rome (v. 15) because Paul knows that the gospel is the “*power of God for salvation*” and that God will use it to save many people (v. 16), even though they are unrighteous and do not deserve it...for in the gospel “*the righteousness of God is revealed*” for those who believe (“*from faith to faith*”) the gospel message (v. 17).

B. Development of theme in body of letter – **Romans 1:18–15:13**

1. **Romans 1:18–3:20** develops the need for the gospel because all men stand condemned before God.
2. **Romans 3:21–4:25** brings us to the solution...the heart of the gospel, which is justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
3. **Romans 5:1–8:39** presents the fruit of the gospel and how sweet to the taste that fruit is. Whoever believes the gospel has a secure hope of salvation in Jesus Christ.
4. **Romans 9:1–11:36** vindicates God’s plan for the gospel in relation to two groups: National Israel and the Gentiles.
5. **Romans 12:1–15:13** lays down the imperative of the gospel. Those who truly have been justified are being transformed, which is not an option for true believers; it is an imperative.

C. Development of theme in conclusion to letter – **Romans 15:14–16:27**

⊞ Two important matters:

1. Paul plans to advance the gospel to Spain (cf. Rom 15:17–24). Proclaiming the gospel is Paul’s spiritual heartbeat.
2. To the very end, Paul is consumed with the message of the gospel. Note his benediction (16:25–27).

III. Incorporating the Theme into a Working Outline

A. PAUL’S GOSPEL MISSION: INTRODUCTORY MATTERS (1:1–17)

1. Author (1:1–6) – Identity and Qualifications
2. Recipients (1:7a)

3. Greeting (1:7b)
4. Thanksgiving/Prayer Wish/Commitment (1:8–15)
5. Theme (1:16–17)

B. NEED FOR GOSPEL—UNIVERSAL CONDEMNATION OF MANKIND (1:18–3:20)

C. HEART OF GOSPEL—JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (3:21–4:25)

D. FRUIT OF GOSPEL—SECURE HOPE OF SALVATION (5:1–8:39)

E. VINDICATION OF GOSPEL—GOD’S WORD HAS NOT FAILED (HIS SALVATION PLAN FOR ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES; 9:1–11:36)

F. IMPERATIVE OF GOSPEL—TRANSFORMED LIVING (12:1–15:13)

G. PAUL’S GOSPEL PLANS: CONCLUDING MATTERS (15:14–16:27)

IV. Analyzing the Theme in Relationship to the Topic (Directional and Incomplete)

A. Paul’s Gospel Mission: Introductory Matters

1. The gospel was promised in the Old Testament (v. 2)

Application to Topic:

2. The gospel concerns “*Jesus Christ our Lord*” (v. 4b)

a. The Son of God (v. 3a)

- To be God’s Son means Jesus Christ is Messiah, the coming King (cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; Jer 23:5–6; Jn 1:49).
- To be God’s Son means Jesus Christ is equal with God the Father and has infinite fellowship with Him (cf. Jn 10:22–39; 17:1–26).
- As pre-existent Son, He became incarnate: “*born*”.

b. The Son of God Incarnate (v. 3b)

The Son took to Himself human nature, of the seed of David, and therefore as the seed of David He can and will fulfill all the promises related to David. One must believe this (cf. 1 Jn 4:2–3).

c. The Son of God with Power (v. 4)

- Some people view the title Son as being applied to the Second Person of the Trinity only following His incarnation. Scripture teaches that Jesus has always been the Son of God. And, here, because of the resurrection He is declared to be the Son-of-God-with-power. Power for what, we might ask? Power to save (cf. Heb 7:25; Rom 1:16).
- Jesus was resurrected “*according to the Spirit of holiness*” or “*according to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.*” From the incarnation, all during Jesus’ earthly ministry, clear through the resurrection the Holy Spirit worked in Christ Jesus to accomplish the will of the Father in providing and securing redemption.

Summary Remarks:

Verses 3 and 4 contain the gospel in summary form. No incarnation...no salvation. No death on the cross...no salvation. But no resurrection...also no salvation (cf. Rom 10:9–10).

Application to Topic:

B. Need for the Gospel – Universal Condemnation of Mankind (1:18–3:20)

1. God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven (1:18a).

⊞ *Reason:*

a. Man has abandoned God (1:18b–23).

- Man has suppressed God’s truth even though it is clearly evident within General Revelation (1:18b–20).
- Furthermore man has actively perverted God’s truth (1:21–23).

⊞ *Therefore:*

b. God has abandoned man (1:24–32).

- God has abandoned man to physical impurity (1:24–25).

- God has abandoned man to unnatural sexual perversion (1:26–27).
 - God has abandoned man to all kinds of depraved living (1:28–32).
2. God's judgment is impending (2:1–16).
 - a. God's judgment is right (2:1–2).
 - b. God's judgment is inescapable (2:3).
 - c. God's judgment is proportionate (2:4–5).
 - d. God's judgment is impartial (2:6–11).
 - e. God's judgment is appropriate (2:12–15).
 - f. God's judgment is intensive (2:16).
 3. Not even the self-righteous Jew has hope (2:17–3:8).
 - a. Their false platforms of security will be removed (2:17–29).
 - Their covenant relationship with God will not protect them from condemning judgment (2:17).
 - Their superior knowledge of God's Law will not protect them from condemning judgment (2:18–24).
 - Their outward rite of circumcision will not protect them from condemning judgment (2:25–29).
 - b. Their self-righteous objections to Paul's teaching only serve to reinforce their condemnation (3:1–8).
 4. In fact, all mankind is guilty (3:9–20).
 - a. Accusation (3:9) – All are under sin
 - b. Evidence (3:10–18) – God's Word in the Old Testament
 - c. Verdict (3:19–20) – Guilty

Conclusion: Paul has proven his point. The gospel *is* absolutely necessary. Man has no opportunity for salvation apart from it. There is a *desperate* need for the gospel.

Application to Topic:

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C. Heart of the Gospel – Justification by Faith (3:21–4:25)

1. God’s method of justification is explained (3:21–31).

a. Its nature

- *Identified* (3:21) – The “*righteousness of God*” is at the central core of the nature of justification (v. 21).
- *Described* (3:21–24)
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is “*apart from the Law*” (3:21).
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is “*witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*” (3:21).
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is received “*through faith in Jesus Christ*” (3:22).
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is available to both Jews and Gentiles (3:22).
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is desperately needed by all (3:23).
 - The “*righteousness of God*” is graciously given free of charge in connection with justification (3:24).

b. Its ground (3:24b–25a)

- The “*gift of righteousness*” is grounded in the redemption which Christ provided (3:24b).
- The “*gift of righteousness*” is grounded in the atoning sacrifice Christ made to satisfy the wrath of God, revealed from Heaven (3:25b).

c. Its demonstration (vv. 25b–26)

“*This was to demonstrate His righteousness...*” (3:25)

“*... for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness...*” (3:26a)

“*... so that He would be just...*” (3:26a)

God is just, or righteous in...

- Forgiving sins in the Old Testament era (3:25b).
- Forgiving sins in the New Testament era (3:26a).

Conclusion: The sacrificial death of Christ *vindicates* the justice of God in forgiving sin in all ages of the world since God punished those sins in Christ. Therefore, God is just in justifying the person who relies on Jesus as his or her propitiatory sacrifice.

d. Its implications (3:27–31)

- Justification by faith humbles man by excluding all grounds for boasting in himself (3:27–28).
- Justification by faith demonstrates that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:29–30).
- Justification by faith establishes the Law (3:31).

2. God’s method of justification is illustrated (4:1–25).

a. Abraham was justified by faith apart from works (4:1–8).

b. Abraham was justified by faith apart from circumcision (4:9–12).

- c. Abraham was justified by faith apart from the Law (4:13–17).
- d. Abraham was justified by faith apart from sight (4:17–25).

Summary:

Abraham's experience in parallel with NT era believers:

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|---|---|
| <p>1. God made Abraham a promise (a child in his old age).</p> | <p>1. God made us a promise. Jesus died for “<i>our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification</i>” (v. 25) so that we could obtain a right standing before God.</p> |
| <p>2. Despite the improbability of the promise, Abraham believed God.</p> | <p>2. Despite the improbability of the promise that we do not have to work (vv. 1–8), or observe ceremonies and rituals (vv. 9–12), or keep any rules (vv. 13–16) to receive justification, we believe God's promise in Christ (vv. 23–25).</p> |
| <p>3. Therefore, God credited righteousness to Abraham's account.</p> | <p>3. Therefore, God credits righteousness to our account.</p> |

Application to Topic:

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D. Fruit of the Gospel – Secure Hope of Salvation (5:1–8:39)

Basic Structure:

The structure of this section emphasizes that justified believers may be absolutely confident of their future hope in Christ... because of what God has done for them in Christ and because of who they are in Christ:

a Because of God’s work for us through Christ our future glory is secure (5:1–11).

b We may be confident of future glory because we have new life in Christ, as opposed to death and condemnation in Adam (5:12–21).

c Sin no longer keeps us in bondage, blocking our future glory because we are no longer under its authority (6:1–23).

c’ Law is no longer used by sin to keep us in bondage, blocking our future glory because we are no longer under its authority (7:1–25).

b’ We may be confident of future glory because our new life in Christ is mediated by the indwelling presence of the Spirit Who works in our lives to prepare us for glory... helping us battle indwelling sin and helping us to persevere under suffering (8:1–30).

a’ Because of God’s work for us through Christ our future glory is secure (8:31–39). [cf. Moo]

We will work from a more simplified outline:

Hope announced (ch. 5)

Hope defended (chs. 6–7)

Hope affirmed (ch. 8)

1. Hope announced (5:1–21) – Benefits of Justification
 - a. Peace with God (5:1)
 - b. Access into grace (5:2)
 - c. Exulting “*in hope of the glory of God*” (5:2)
 - d. Exulting in “*tribulations*” (5:3–5a)
 - e. Experiencing the love of God (5:5b–10)

- The love of God subjectively considered (5:5)
 - The love of God objectively considered (5:6–10)
- f. Exulting in “*God*” (5:11)
- g. Represented by Christ (5:12–21)
2. Hope defended (6:1–7:25)
- a. Sin will not overcome our salvation in Christ (6:1–23) – Response to the Libertine.
- The believer has “*died to sin*” (6:1–14).
 - The believer has been enslaved to God and righteousness (6:15–23).
- b. Law will not be able to be misused by sin to overcome our salvation in Christ (7:1–25) – Response to the Legalist.
- The believer has been liberated from the Law’s condemnatory function through the death of Christ (7:1–6).
 - The Law is good, but it was not designed to justify the unbeliever (7:7–13).
 - The Law is good, but it was not designed to sanctify the believer (7:14–25).
3. Hope affirmed (8:1–39)
- a. Those in Christ have been given the Spirit Who...
- Frees us from condemnation (8:1–4a).
 - Effects a new walk (8:4b–8).
 - Guarantees a resurrected body (8:9–11).
 - Helps us put “*to death the deeds of the body*” (8:12–13).
 - Leads us as sons through suffering to glory (8:14–30).
 - The privileges of sons (8:14–17a)

- The proving of sons (8:17b–23)
- The provision of sons (8:24–30)
- b. Those in Christ have God on their side (8:31–39).
 - God’s work for us in Christ (8:32–34) [cf. Moo]
 - God’s love for us in Christ (8:35–39) [cf. Moo]

Application to Topic:

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E. Vindication of Gospel – God’s Word Has Not Failed (His Salvation Plan for Israel and the Gentiles) (9:1–11:36)

1. Paul’s concern for his “*kinsmen according to the flesh*” – Introductory Matters (9:1–5)
2. Paul’s concern for God’s honor – God’s Word has not failed (9:6–10:21).
 - a. God is sovereign in salvation (9:6–29).
 - God’s sovereign administration of His salvation announced (9:6)
 - God’s sovereign administration of His salvation illustrated (9:7–13)
 - The illustration of Isaac (9:7–9)
 - The illustration of Jacob and Esau (9:10–13)

- God’s sovereign administration of His salvation defended (9:14–23)
 - God’s sovereign administration of His salvation particularized (9:24–29)
 - Calling of Gentiles (9:25–26)
 - Calling of Jews (9:27–29)
- b. Israelites are responsible for their decision in regards to the gospel (9:30–10:21).
- Pursuing righteousness (9:30–10:4)
 - Gentiles (9:30)
 - Jews (9:31–10:4)
 - Receiving righteousness (10:5–13)
 - How *not* to receive righteousness (10:5)
 - How to receive righteousness (10:6–13)
 - Proclaiming righteousness (10:14–17)
 - Rejecting righteousness (10:18–21)
3. Paul’s concern for his “*kinsmen according to the flesh*” revisited – God has not rejected Israel totally or finally (11:1–32).
- a. God has not rejected Israel totally (11:1–10).
- b. Israel has not stumbled irretrievably (11:11–32).

Note:

1. In verses 11c–32, Paul presents God’s salvific plan for Israel in three sections:

- a. Making Jews jealous (vv. 11c–15)
- b. Grafting in the natural branches (vv. 16–24)
- c. Saving all Israel (vv. 25–32)

2. Paul’s pastoral concern—He wants the Jewish and Gentile believers to be on the same page in terms of God’s plan of salvation. Jews should

not give up in despair. Gentiles should not arrogantly assume that God has taken Israel's promises away from her and given them to the Gentiles.

4. Paul's praise for God's plan of salvation declared – Doxological conclusion (11:33–36)

Application to Topic:

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F. Imperative of the Gospel – Transformed Living (12:1–15:13)

1. Addressing duty in general (12:1–13:14)
 - a. Duty to God – Giving God our all for the purpose of proving by experience that His will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (12:1–2)
 - b. Duty in church – Properly relating to the body of Christ for the purpose of proving by experience that God's will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (12:3–16)
 - Duty in general (12:3–8)
 - Duty in particular (12:9–16)
 - c. Duty before unbelievers – Properly relating to those outside the body of Christ for the purpose of proving by experience that God's will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (12:17–21)
 - d. Duty to civil government – Properly relating to civil government for the purpose of proving by experience that God's will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (13:1–7)
 - e. Duty in general – Properly relating to all those we interact with daily for the purpose of proving by experience that God's will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (13:8–10)

- f. Duty to Christ – Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ knowing that darkness’s time is almost done; salvation is at hand... for the purpose of proving by experience that God’s will is “*good and acceptable and perfect*” (13:11–14)

2. Addressing duty in particular (14:1–15:13)

⌘ Context

Ethical Christian living springs from love for one’s neighbor (Rom 13:8–10), knowing that the time is short and Jesus is coming soon (Rom 13:11–14). The ethical fountain of the troubled Romans (in chapter 14) was being drawn from a well of puffed-up, judgmental knowledge. It was not springing from a cistern of love through Christ. And this puffed-up, judgmental knowledge was in danger of upsetting the unity of the church of Rome (cf. Rom 14:1–4). And church unity is not a small thing to the *Head* of the church... the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 4:1–3; Phil 2:1–4; 1 Jn 4:7–12; see also Jesus’ stress on love and unity in community of believers—Jn 13:34–35; 17:20–21).

⌘ Specific issue

Paul calls the issue in Rome an issue of “*faith*.” The weak were being “*weak in faith*.” The main issue is found in verse 2. “*One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only*” (NAU). A minority in the church in Rome considered the eating of meat detrimental to their Christian walk. We call them a minority because Paul tells the Roman church community (majority) to accept them. This minority is in all probability composed of scrupulous Jews who desire to serve their Messiah from a sincere heart. They do not want to eat anything that may cause them to be unclean before His eyes.

The “Kosher” food regulations were fresh in their minds. They were unsure of the preparation of meats in the Roman marketplace, so they abstained from eating meat altogether. As Paul will state (Rom 14:14), the weak were thinking wrong about this specific issue, but Paul in no way condemns them for not eating meat. He is more concerned about their attitude toward Christ and toward their strong brethren. Yet the weak actually could eat meat (Rom 14:14). So the weak were “*weak in faith*.”

This limits what is at stake in the issue. It *is* an *issue* of faith, but it is an issue of faith applied to the *Christian’s* daily walk, not to a person’s acceptance before God. In other words, the weak were *not* saying that you must believe in Jesus Christ *and* observe the ceremonial aspects of Judaism in order to be saved. If this had been the case, the solution Paul put forward would have been different. These Christian brethren would *not* have been “*weak*” brethren who needed acceptance; they would have been “*false brethren*” who needed to be excommunicated and

put out into the realm of their father the Devil. So being weak in the faith here has nothing to do with believing the gospel. Both sides believed the pure gospel.

But, this does not mean that either side saw the issue of how they applied faith to their daily walk before Christ as inconsequential. Indeed, the opposite was true, as well it should have been. However, each side felt that *their* daily walk of faith was the correct way to please God. Each side was so committed to their *own* understanding of pleasing God that they were willing to hold the other side in contempt and/or judge them. They adopted this attitude toward the *other* side, it seems, in order to try to persuade them to join *their* side and become a “better Christian” as a result.

⌘ Solution identified (vv. 1, 3)

Even if both sides were to continue in the same practice—that is, with the weak eating vegetables only and the strong eating both vegetables and meat—both sides were called upon to accept each other: “*Now accept the one who is weak in faith...*” The idea is to welcome him or her as a true and loved family member, afforded all the privileges of one who belongs to the Church. This is the obligation of the strong to the weak (v. 1) and, by implication, of the weak to the strong (v. 3). In fact, Paul tells both sides to accept each other in Romans 15:7: ¶ “*Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*”

Note: Paul presents the solution to the Romans’ problem at the very beginning of this section: “*Acceptance.*” Believers need to accept/welcome each other in the body, despite differences over how each one honors God in practice, as long as any differences do not ultimately impact “*the faith*” negatively. To welcome each other in the body is to afford to each other all the privileges of one who belongs to the church on an equal footing. Because Paul presents the solution to the problem first, he emphasizes it.

- a. Love’s duty (14:1–4)
- b. Love’s mindset (14:5–12)
- c. Love’s practice (14:13–15:6)
 - What love does *not* do – Love does not cause a brother to stumble (14:13–23).
 - What love does – Love bears another brother’s “*weaknesses*” (15:1–6).
- d. Love’s goal (15:7–13)

Note: The main goal of love's holy expression of unity in the church is the glory of God. *God is greatly glorified when His people praise Him together in unity... one heart... one voice.* Paul emphasizes this theme in verses 6, 7 and 9.

Application to Topic:

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G. Paul's Gospel Plans – Concluding Matters (15:14–16:27)

1. Paul's gospel plans (15:14–33)
 - a. Apostolic privilege: Reminding the saints (15:14–16)
 - b. Gospel preaching: Boasting in Christ's power (15:17–19)
 - c. Mission parameters: Pioneering the gospel (15:20–22)
 - d. Long-range plans: Advancing the gospel (15:23–24)
 - e. Immediate priorities: Uniting the church (15:25–29)
 - f. Requesting prayers: Acknowledging the need for God to work (15:30–33)
2. Concluding matters (16:1–27)
 - a. Commendation: A serving sister – Phoebe (16:1–2)

- b. Greetings to the Romans from Paul (16:3–16a)
- c. Greetings to the Romans from all the churches (16:16b)
- d. Abrupt warning (16:17–20)
 - Problem faced
 - The work of false teachers (16:17b)
 - The character of false teachers (16:18a)
 - The method of false teachers (16:18b)
 - The target of false teachers (16:19a)
 - The leader of false teachers (16:20)
 - Response enjoined
 - Urgently watch (16:17).
 - “*Turn away*” (16:17).
 - Practice truth (16:19).
 - Solution provided
 - “*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*” (16:20a).
 - “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*” (16:20b).
- e. Greetings to the Romans from Paul’s co-laborers (16:21–23)
- f. Benediction: Praise to God for His glorious gospel (16:25–27)

Application to Topic:

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CONCLUDING REMARKS:

I think it wise to reflect upon Paul's teaching in Romans, as well as the other New Testament epistles in developing a doctrine of separation. On the one hand, we do not want to exclude those who are "*weak in faith*." On the other hand we do not want to water down Paul's doctrine just so we can include more people in our local assemblies.

I am more concerned that because of the pull of conservative new-evangelicalism there may be a tendency to broaden the reach of our creeds and confessions to cover more people and in the process stand down on certain doctrines we are confident that the apostles taught. Our rationale might be that some things are not central to salvation and therefore are not worth standing for or causing a division over. For Baptists, we certainly would fight for immersion but are we willing to stand up for the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on this earth when He returns in which God will fulfill all the promises He made to National Israel in the Old Testament with National Israel? Is this doctrine, which is taught in Scripture and reaffirmed in Romans, worth standing up for? I say "Yes!" And obviously, there are other doctrines worth defending that may not be identified as central to salvation.

So I would urge us to carefully reflect upon what Paul says in Romans and not be hesitant to stand up for *any* of it.