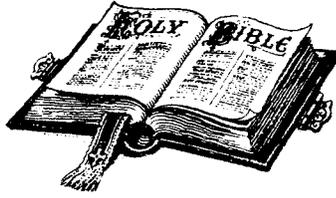


THE INSTRUCTOR



"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16

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‘MARK . . . AND AVOID THEM’

In writing to the saints of God at Rome, the apostle Paul said: **“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”** (Romans 16:17-18).

Several clear points should be gleaned from the reading of Romans 16:17-18. Let us consider some of them.

1. There are those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine of Christ.

2. Those who cause such divisions and offences are **not** serving Jesus Christ.

3. Those who cause such divisions are serving their own appetites.

4. By their good (smooth) words and fair speeches those who cause such divisions and offences will deceive and mislead the innocent.

5. Christians should **mark** and **avoid** those who cause such divisions and occasions of stumbling.

There are at least four words that are listed among “the works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21 which indicate that divisions and occasions of stumbling are sinful. Let us consider those four words.

1. **VARIANCE.** The word that is

translated **variance** in Gal. 5:20 is translated **strife** in Romans 13:13 and 1 Cor. 3:3 as well as other passages. As used in Gal. 5:20 it is defined by THAYER’S LEXICON, P. 249, to mean **“contention, strife, wrangling . . .”** Contending for or wrangling over things that are sinful (such as upholding, defending, endorsing, encouraging or having fellowship with a person or persons who are living in sin) may cause division among the people of God. Certainly one who is contending for truth and right and is refusing to have fellowship with one who is in sin or with one who is defending those in sin is **not** guilty of causing **variance**. Other things may also cause **variance** or **strife**.

2. **STRIFE.** This word is closely akin to **variance**. It suggests **contention, strife, quarreling or faction**. THAYER’S LEXICON defines the word translated **strife** here as **“a courting distinction, a desire to put oneself forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts: partisanship, factiousness: . . .”** p. 249. A person who puts himself forward and creates a faction among the people of God to satisfy his own desires rather than make correction of the sin in his own life is guilty of **strife**.

3. **SEDITIONS.** This word is from the same word that is translated **“di-**

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Editorial - - -

ARE YOU A FRIEND OF CHRIST?

No doubt, most of you would answer "yes" to the question: "Are you a friend of Christ?" However, this would not necessarily mean that you are really His friend. It would only mean that you **think** you are His friend. There is a way that you can **know** that you are truly a friend of Jesus Christ.

In talking to His disciples, Jesus said: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14). True friendship involves mutual understanding and love. Jesus understands our needs and He loves us. We need to understand His word and obey what He says. We must have a love for Jesus and His truth. Friendship with Jesus is not by chance, but it is by choice! We choose to be His friends or we choose not to be His friends. Friendship with Jesus Christ is **conditional** and He has given us the terms of friendship. To be His friends, we must accept His terms of friendship. There is no other way.

To be a friend of Jesus Christ one must **do** something. But it is not enough just to do something. One must do "**whatsoever**" Jesus commands. He has the right to command because He has "**all power**" both in heaven and in earth. See Matthew 28:18 where He said: "All power is given unto me both in heaven and in earth." He is our King! He is our Ruler! He is our High Priest! He is our Advocate! He

is the Head of the church! We must listen to Him, believe what He says and "**do whatsoever**" He commands us!

Remember this fact: Jesus Christ does **not** become your friend on your terms, but you can become His friend only if you are willing to comply with the conditions He has given. **Are you a friend of Christ?** Do you **know** what His terms of friendship are? Do you desire to know? Really?

Not all who **claim** to be His friends are really the friends of Jesus Christ. **Claiming** to be a friend of the Lord's is **no proof** that one is His friend.

Not all who are **morally upright** are His friends. A true friend of Christ (a true Christian) will see the need and the advantages of living a morally pure life. He will endeavor to live morally pure and he will encourage others to do so. He recognizes the fact that those who engage in the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. (See Galatians 5:19-21). He recognizes the fact that he must deny himself of ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. (See Titus 2:11-12). He recognizes the need of following peace with all men, "**and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.**" (See Hebrews 12:14). However, one may be morally pure and still be an enemy of God, and thus **not** a friend of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not all who are **religious** are the friends of Jesus Christ. A true friend will in deed practice pure and undefiled religion. James tells us that "**If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.**" (James 1:27). Practicing pure religion is absolutely essential to being a true friend of Jesus Christ. Practicing religion is not enough. One must practice pure and undefiled religion. This is the kind that is revealed in the Scriptures. However, there are many re-

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visions” in our text in Romans 16:17. According to YOUNG it means **“to stand apart.”** THAYER’S LEXICON defines it to mean **“dissension, division; pl. Rom. 16:17; . . . Gal. 5:20 . . .”** p. 153. A person who creates dissension or division among God’s people by upholding a person in sin such as one who has deserted her husband or one who has falsely accused others, is guilty of sin!

4. HERESIES. The idea here is that of **“dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims”** according to THAYER’S LEXICON, p. 16. This may result in a **sect** being formed. This **sect** may claim to be a true congregation of Christ. It may even stand for many basic principles of truth. It may orally teach the truth but in practice it denies the truth in some matters. Cf. Titus 1:16. In 1 Cor. 11:19 Paul tells us this: **“For there must be also heresies (factions or sects — CRS) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”** This is a fact. However, those who defend, encourage or endorse those who are responsible for the **heresies** (sects, factions) that are formed are **not** among those **“which are approved.”** It is a factious spirit that says: **“This church is going to divide and it will be interesting to see who goes where,”** and then works to accomplish a division.

Keep in mind that **variance, strife, seditions (divisions) and heresies** are **“works of the flesh”** and **“they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God!”**

Brethren, **“divisions”** are **sinful!** Those who cause **“divisions”** are guilty of sin! Those who **“fellowship”** those who are responsible for such **“divisions”** are guilty of sin! Those who teach, practice and encourage others to teach and practice truth and principles of right are **not** the cause of the **“divisions”** that occur.

Brethren, you can **not** Scripturally justify those who cause **“divisions”** by saying they are young, immature,

ignorant or sincere. They must bear the responsibility for the **“divisions”** they cause.

You can **not** Scripturally justify yourself (or others) for having fellowship with those who cause **“divisions and occasions of stumbling”** by saying, **“I can preach the gospel of Christ anywhere.”** What Scripture authorizes you to do so? You have no right to preach the gospel anywhere **if** in your preaching and actions connected with your preaching, you defend, endorse, encourage or promote those who are guilty of causing such **“divisions.”** If you **“bid them godspeed”** you **sin** because you become **“partaker of his (their — CRS) evil deeds!”** (See 2 John 11).

You can **not** Scripturally justify yourself (or others) for having fellowship with those who cause **“divisions”** by saying, **“It’s just a personality conflict.”** A so-called **“personality conflict”** does **not** make it right for a person or persons to cause **“divisions and occasions of stumbling.”**

Neither can you justify yourself (or others) for having fellowship with those who cause **“divisions”** by saying, **“Well, there’s wrong on both sides.”** If there is, what Scripture authorizes you to fellowship sin on both sides?

Brethren who preach have no more right to violate Scriptural principles than anyone else.

Paul tells us to **“mark”** those who cause such divisions and offences. To **“mark”** means **“to look at, observe, contemplate . . . to fix one’s eyes upon, direct one’s attention to, anyone: . . .”** according to THAYER’S LEXICON, p. 579. But Paul did **not** stop when he said **“mark”** them. He also said, **“and avoid them.”** AVOID means **“to turn away from, keep aloof from, one’s society; to shun one: Rom. 16:17”** according to THAYER’S LEXICON, p. 196. The ASV says **“. . . and turn away from them”** and the NIV says **“Keep away from them.”**

It is **not** enough for us to **“mark”** (or take note of) those who cause divisions and offences but we **must ALSO**

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"avoid them." This is the same idea that is involved in **rejecting** (or refusing) the heretick mentioned in Titus 3:10 and **withdrawing** from those who walk disorderly who are mentioned in 2 Thes. 3:6. **"Marking and avoiding"** is basically the action commanded by Paul in 1 Cor. 5 in dealing with the fornicator. Paul said **"to deliver such a one unto Satan"** in verse 6. In verse 13 he said **"put away from among yourselves that wicked person."** In verse 11 he said **"not to keep company"** with him and **"with such an one no not to eat."** In other words, they were to **"mark and avoid"** that man. This is **not** too hard to understand, is it? It is harder to practice, isn't it?

The truth taught in these Scriptures will face us in judgment. We may plead ignorance of this truth or we may ignore it. We may try to explain it away or we may try to justify our actions which are contrary to these Scriptures by the "inconsistencies" of others if we so choose. However, **each of us shall give account to God for our attitudes and actions relative to these matters!**

(CRS)

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ligionists whose worship is vain. Although they draw nigh unto God with their mouth and honor God with their lips, their heart is far from God. They

GOSPEL MEETINGS

You are cordially invited and respectfully urged to attend a series of GOSPEL MEETINGS that is scheduled to be conducted at the EAST ALBERTVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST, 1107 Highway 431 South, in Albertville, Alabama. The date for these meetings will be December 9-11, 1983. On Friday and Saturday evenings the service will begin at 7:30 and on Lord's Day at 10:00 A.M., 11:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.

Our beloved brother HIRAM HUTTO of Tuscaloosa, Alabama will be preaching.

worship God in vain because they teach for doctrines the commandments of men. (See Matthew 15:7-9). The Scribes and Pharisees mentioned in Matthew 23 were very religious, but Jesus said to them: **"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"** Many people who do not accept Jesus Christ as God's Son are very religious, but they are **not** His friends!

Remember, in talking to His disciples, Jesus said: **"Ye are my friends IF ye do whatsoever I command you."** (John 15:14). To be a friend of Christ, **it is imperative that you obey what He says!**

(CRS)

— SENTENCE SERMONS —

A person who knows "everything" has a lot to learn.

* * * *

God looks most where man looks least — at the heart.

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