

“Mark Them That Are Causing ...”

Romans sixteen is a mixture of exhortations, greetings, and warnings, concluding with reverent praise to *“the only wise God through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever. Amen”* (Rom. 16:27). Among the warnings he issued is this: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them”* (Rom. 16:17). Paul was concerned that the purity of the church be maintained. He had written and spoken extensively; warning brethren to keep themselves pure, that to practice the works of the flesh would lead to their loss of an inheritance in the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). But Paul was equally concerned that men not corrupt the doctrine of Christ. He that there is one faith; one gospel and that should one preach any gospel other than the gospel he delivered, that one would be accursed (Eph. 4:4; Gal. 1:6-9).

In our generations questions have been raised as to “who is a false teacher?” Some believe that unless a man possesses the characteristics of the men of whom Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2 such a man CANNOT be classified as a false teacher, no matter how much in error he is. It is my understanding that the word “false” applies to what the teacher teaches; not necessarily to the man himself; just as one who is a false witness gives testimony that is false; a false balance is a scale which does not give accurate weight, etc. It is difficult for me to perceive how a man could teach false items and not be a false teacher, but perhaps I have missed something along the way. One thing that must not be ignored is that false teaching, whether from “good, sincere men” or conniving, evil hearted men, will lead to man’s destruction just as quickly from one as the other. Whether it is “proper” to call a sincere but mistaken man whose teaching is false, a false teacher or not; mark it well: the effects of his teaching will have the same result: the destruction of the soul of him who receives it. The only difference I see in the two is that one may be reachable while the other is not. Sincere effort on our part to teach that mistaken one the *“way of the Lord more perfectly”* will reveal his heart.

Paul knew the danger of false teaching. He resisted the teaching of the Judaizers who sought to compel men to be circumcised and keep the law. He called such *“false brethren who came in privily to spy out the liberty we have in Christ”* (Gal. 2:9). He warned that in latter times some would depart from the faith *“giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim. 4:1). He warned of the profane babblings of some, such as *“Hymanaus and Philutus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already and overthrow the faith of some.”* The teaching of such men

whether called "false teachers" or "mistaken teachers" would eat as doth a gangrene (2 Tim. 2:16). He warned elders that "*grievous wolves would arise, speaking perverse things ... to draw away disciples after them*" (Acts 20:29-30).

The warning to the Roman church was similar. Men who taught a different gospel would create divisions and occasion of stumbling among the brethren. Therefore they were to "*mark them and turn away from them.*" Paul does imply something about the character of these men ("*they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly: and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the heart of the innocent,*" Rom. 16:18). But, suppose he had not added these words. Would his warning ("*turn away from them*") have been any different? We are begotten again by incorruptible seed, the conception of a new creature in Christ (1 Peter 1:22). But if is error we are taught, what will error beget? I see little profit arguing whether a good, sincere but honestly mistaken man is a "false teacher" or not. Supposing it is "incorrect" to so identify such a man, will, however he is identified, change the consequences of the error he teaches if someone accepts and practices it? "False teacher" or "mistaken teacher": are we to mark the first but ignore the second? Are we to turn away from the first but receive the second? It is something to give serious thought to!

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