

Romans #94 Warning Against False Teachers (2)

Last Lord's Day we began to consider Paul's injection of a warning regarding false teachers just before he closed his epistle. The main message of his letter had been conveyed with the end of chapter 15. The final chapter opened with commendations and greetings of Paul's friends and fellow servants in the gospel. But then we read this warning in **Romans 16:17-20**.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. ¹⁹For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul appealed to these Christians "to watch out" for false teachers. The reasons cited for this are both stated and implied. The Christians in the church were "to watch out" for these false teachers because they would cause the church much harm. The Christians were also "to watch out", that is to carefully identify who these men were, because they were not easily identifiable.

Last Lord's Day we sought to show how Paul's concern and warning are disregarded by many in today's evangelical churches. We spoke of one of the reasons for this is the general disinterest even disdain that people of our time and culture have toward the very idea of doctrine. The word itself—doctrine—is viewed with suspicion, even rejection. But we showed how the Word of God places high value on the matter of one's doctrine. And we understand that doctrine is simply a word that describes that which is true, that which is biblical teaching. True doctrine is to be sought and taught. We as a church are to strive to achieve unity of doctrine. This is one of the primary functions of God-called ministers of the gospel, to serve the church by bring it to maturity through teaching doctrine.

¹⁰ He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³***until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood***, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be ***children***, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about ***by every wind of doctrine***, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, ***speaking the truth in love***, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

¹⁷Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in ***the futility of their minds***. ¹⁸***They are darkened in their understanding***, alienated from the life of God because of the ***ignorance*** that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- ²¹assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as ***the truth*** is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit ***of your minds***, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵Therefore, having put

away falsehood, let each one of you speak *the truth* with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Eph. 4:10-25)

The words highlighted and emboldened show the importance of “the truth”, also known as “the faith”, that is, due regard for sound “doctrine.” Also highlighted is that this all takes place in the arena of the “the mind”, or the “understanding.” The manner in which God transforms His people, enabling them to grow from “children” to maturity, bringing them to become the kind of church that truly glorifies God, is through transforming their thinking regarding doctrinal truth even as they live in a manner consistent with that truth. What Paul was asserting here in Ephesians 4 is what he exhorted to the church at Rome in Romans 12:1 and 2.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We pointed out last week that Paul argues that false doctrine is the cause of “divisions” and “create obstacles” before the people of God. Teaching sound doctrine is the corrective to this problem and is the preventive of future problems in a wide range of matters.

This emphasis on teaching sound doctrine is foundational to a sound and fruitful local church. When Paul gave instructions to Timothy on what he would encounter when he pastored the church at Ephesus, Paul gave this instruction.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and his kingdom: ²*preach the word*; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and *teaching*. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound *teaching*, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to *the truth* and wander off into *myths*. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:1-4)

The above quote is the ESV translation.¹ I think that the choice of wording was adapted to some degree by the perception of the prospective readers of their translation of the Bible. The Greek word translated as “teaching” is in the King James Version as “doctrine.”² Paul commanded Timothy to preach sound doctrine in order to prevent and correct the people in the church from embracing their preferred “myths” or false doctrine. People in the church, the professing people of God, when given their preference, choose “myths”, that is, false doctrine, to sound doctrine. The role of the pastor is to preach sound doctrine even over the anticipated objections of his church members. God has called him and entrusted him with this responsibility. In Romans 16:17-21 the apostle was warning the church at Rome “to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”

The naive are ones who are unformed. These would be new Christians or unformed Christians who had not been grounded in sound doctrine so as to enable them to recognize and turn from false doctrine. The naïve are persuaded by *smooth talk* and *flattery*. The content of the teaching of these false teachers is either very shallow or in error. But that does not seem to matter. The people are not interested in or desirous of content. And so, false teachers are able to deceive people by their style, their manner of speech.

¹ ESV is the English Standard Version

² Interestingly the New King James Version also translated the word as “teaching.”

I recently heard a man speak before a gathering of Christians and they seemed to be very impressed by him. Their favorable response was evident. It was not due to the content of what he said, because he was void of substance. But that did not seem to matter. He had a manner, a style of speaking, that appealed to those present. He peppered his speech with words and phrases of pop jargon, expressions that showed that “he was one of them.” He even used some language that I thought was inappropriate and unseemly, at least it should have been perceived as so by half-way sanctified Christians, if they were present. Afterward I had opportunity to speak with him. I was introduced to him as the pastor of this church and some of my background was conveyed to him. When he spoke with me he presented an entirely different air about him than when he was speaking publicly just a few minutes before. He spoke to me as one who was dignified, educated, and very articulate. His personal manner so differed from his public presentation, and that because his public speech lacked biblical reference or doctrinal content, but rather used “smooth talk and flattery”, I questioned in my thinking his legitimacy as a man of God. Rather than sounding like a man of God from the pulpit, he seemed to fit the description of Paul in Romans 16:18, “For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” I must say that the soundness of his motivation is questionable. Not that we can discern the motives of the heart, but Paul declared that people who attempt influence the people of God through “smooth talk and flattery” are such persons who “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.”

Paul had given instruction to Titus regarding his ministry for Christ that was to be characterized by sound doctrine.

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for *sound doctrine*: ²that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; ³the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- ⁴that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. ⁶Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, ⁷in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; *in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, ⁸sound speech that cannot be condemned*, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (Titus 2:1-7)

Now many believe doctrine to be lifeless, even deadening; that it has little value for practical living. But note again what Paul declared to Titus. If Titus would “speak the things which are proper for *sound doctrine*, it would lead older men to “be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience.” It would also result in the older women becoming “reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.” Titus was to make sure that as he was teaching sound doctrine that his life and speech be characterized by “integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, and sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

Let us now continue to consider our text of Romans 12:17-21. We read in **verse 19**, “*For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*” The obedience of the Christians in the church at Rome was well known and attested everywhere. Paul rejoiced in their obedience. He was as the apostle John, who would later write, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). But Paul desired their growth in understanding. But he did not desire their understanding of all things, but only of good things. He wrote, “*But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*” Paul had expressed similar instructions in his other epistles. **1 Corinthians 14:20** reads, “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. *Be infants in evil*, but in your thinking be mature.” And in **1 Thessalonians 5:21** we read, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

The ways of God are different than the ways of the world. The world teaches us that in order for a person to be mature and fully able to make sound judgments, he needs to be exposed to all sides of a matter, to experience every possibility, and then he is able to make a sound judgment. But the Holy Scriptures teach us that we should be “wise to what is good” but “innocent as to what is evil.” In the garden the serpent tempted Eve with the idea that she had to taste of that fruit and then she would be able to make judgments that would govern her life. God’s way is to have His people give themselves over to what is true, right, and good. As Paul wrote elsewhere:

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me--practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:8-10)

When people are wise to do evil and ignorant of doing right, they may be assured of God’s judgment upon them. The following words were recorded in the days of Jeremiah when Judah was soon to experience the wrath of God’s judgment.

¹⁹O my soul, my soul!
I am pained in my very heart!
My heart makes a noise in me;
I cannot hold my peace,
Because you have heard, O my soul,
The sound of the trumpet,
The alarm of war.

²⁰Destruction upon destruction is cried,
For the whole land is plundered.
Suddenly my tents are plundered,
And my curtains in a moment.

²¹How long will I see the standard,
And hear the sound of the trumpet?

²²“For My people are foolish,
They have not known Me.
They are silly children,
And they have no understanding.
They are wise to do evil,
But to do good they have no knowledge.”

²³I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void;
And the heavens, they had no light.

²⁴I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled,
And all the hills moved back and forth.

²⁵I beheld, and indeed there was no man,
And all the birds of the heavens had fled.

²⁶I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness,
And all its cities were broken down
At the presence of the LORD,
By His fierce anger.

²⁷For thus says the LORD:
“The whole land shall be desolate;

Yet I will not make a full end.
²⁸For this shall the earth mourn,
And the heavens above be black,
Because I have spoken.
I have purposed and will not relent,
Nor will I turn back from it. (Jer. 4:19-28)

When you are wise to what is good and innocent to evil, then they may be assured that the God of peace will be with you. Paul declared to the church, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

Now in order for Christians to obey this teaching of God’s Word in Romans 16:9 (“I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”), they must be capable of distinguishing between that which is good and evil. This ability to identify clearly between good and evil, as well as between truth and error, right and wrong, is what we call *discernment*. The Scriptures speak to the need of God’s people to be discerning in order that they may understand fully the will of God for their lives. There is much error about us and God’s people are capable of embracing much of it to their own detriment. This is due to their ignorance of truth, the craftiness of deceivers, and their own susceptibility to being deceived.

We have spoken about this matter of discernment a great deal in the past, but probably before many of you were among us. It is an important matter, however, and therefore always needs to be rehearsed. Peter had expressed his purpose to repeat truth before the people of God, even though he had informed them on prior occasions.

¹²For this reason I will not be negligent *to remind* you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. ¹³Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by *reminding* you, ¹⁴knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ¹⁵Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have *a reminder of these things* after my decease. (2 Pet. 1:12-15)

Peter knew that they had heard and knew these things. But that did not deter him from reminding them of these truths. As long as he was able to influence them, he would keep on reminding them. Even after he died, he would be sure that they always would have a reminder of the things he had taught them. Repetition of sound teaching is good and necessary for the people of God.

The Bible refers frequently to the concept of discernment. The two words which are most frequently used to connote this process are the Hebrew word *bin* and the Greek word *diakrino*. According to Jay Adams in his book, *A Call to Discernment*, the Hebrew word is used 247 times in the Old Testament.³ The word has been translated variously as “understand, discern, distinguish.” When it is used, the word suggests “to separate things from one another at their points of difference in order to distinguish them.” Adams goes on to write that “it refers to the process by which one comes to know or understand God’s thoughts and ways through separating those things that differ.”⁴ The Greek word is used similarly in the New Testament. It too refers to a process of separating or discriminating whereby truth may be set apart in relief from that which is false. In short, discernment is a filtering process by which a person distinguishes and separates good from the bad, right from wrong, and truth from error.

The New Testament teaches that the ability to discern is linked with the measure of the maturity of a Christian. The classic passage on this subject is **Hebrews 5:12-14**.

³ Jay Adams, *A Call for Discernment* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1987), p. 46.

⁴ Ibid.

¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The writer was addressing Hebrew Christians of the first century who were under the threat of persecution for their faith. They faced the temptation of removing themselves from hardship by renouncing Christ and returning to Judaism, which was an accepted and legal religion of the empire. The writer set forth a word of exhortation to them, urging them to persevere. There was no return possible. Christ and the salvation He brought had fulfilled Old Testament religion. Among the many arguments set forth, the writer sought to show how superior Christ's high priesthood was to the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant. The ministry of Christ as a high priest resembled that of the Old Testament priest Melchizedec, who was neither a descendant of Abraham nor a Levite. But the writer paused, and gave a rebuke to his readers. For although the matters he discussed were complex, they would not have posed difficulty for the Hebrews had they not been "*dull of hearing*" (5:11). Furthermore, the writer rebuked them, for they were but babies when they should have long since become mature teachers (5:12). The writer then explains what constitutes maturity in verses 13 and 14: "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who *"because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."* The measure of Christian maturity, by definition, is *the ability to exercise discernment*.

We read in **Hebrews 5:12** that these Christians should have been farther along in the Christian faith than where they were presently. "*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*" Now the writer may have been somewhat rhetorical in his statement that they should all have been teachers, for not everyone can be, nor should be a teacher in a formal sense. Perhaps the writer expresses himself in this fashion to "shame" them, thereby stimulating them to become more diligent in learning. But on the other hand, in a sense every Christian should be a teacher of others. When we learn of God's Word, not only are we to apply it to our own lives, but we are to make known to others the truth that we learn from God's Word. The point the writer was making was that they should not only be farther advanced themselves, but they should be instrumental in bring others along to maturity.

But not only were they dull of hearing and unable to teach others, he said to them, "*you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*" They were incapable of learning of Melchizedek; they were in need of being taught the basics; they were in need of a follow-up program--the food of infants. Now although he said that they were in need of the basics again, he was not going to provide it for them. He would proceed to speak about the things of Christ relating to Melchizedek. There is a need to challenge and stretch people with respect to the Word of God. Much of modern church ministry philosophy advocates dumbing things down from the pulpit to the lowest common denominator. But this is not what our Lord did. He stretched people's capacity and challenged them to think high thoughts, work through deep spiritual realities. We should do no less. Those with less ability or background will glean some truth when those who are farther in the Lord are challenged. The overall growth and maturity of the church will be improved in the body is challenged with understanding the deep things of God.

Now here in Hebrews 5:12 "milk" is a metaphor for the basic, simple truths of the gospel. Often times this metaphor is wrongly imported to another passage that speaks of the word of God as "milk." **1 Peter 2:1-3** reads,

¹Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

In the context of 1 Peter 1, “to desire the pure milk of the word” is *not* a command to new Christians to long for the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Sometimes this verse is used wrongly to argue this point. It is said, “What we need are only the basics. Christians will grow if we focus on the simple and fundamental teachings of the Scriptures.” The basic error of this position is imposing the meaning of babies’ milk from Hebrews 5 upon the metaphor in 1 Peter 2:2. Yes, Hebrews 5:12 and 13 use the analogy of “mother’s milk” to connote the simplest teachings of the faith.⁵ The problem arises when you take the meaning of “milk” from Hebrews 5 and import it into 1 Peter 2:2, saying that “milk” means basic teaching. That is not Peter’s point at all. What he is saying is this, as mother’s milk is craved by a baby, who upon feeding is nourished and as a result grows, so all Christians, not just young Christians, should desire the “Word of God” that they might grow. There is nothing to suggest the degree of complexity of the message in 1 Peter 2.

We next read in **Hebrews 5:13 and 14** what it is to be spiritually dull of hearing. ***“For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”*** Here he describes the immature Christian. There has to be a time when one advances beyond this first stage. Our churches should be moving people along to these advanced stages of maturity. People need to be “weaned” of milk and brought to “maturity.”

The writer describes Christian maturity as the ability to discern between right and wrong. “But solid food is for the mature, who ***because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.***” The measure of Christian maturity, by definition, is the ability to exercise discernment. This is what it is to be spiritually mature: you have developed the ability to distinguish between truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. This idea of Christian maturity is consistent with other places in the New Testament.

We find the same association of discernment and spiritual maturity in **Ephesians 4:11-16**. There we read,

¹¹And He Himself (Jesus Christ) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴***that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive,*** ¹⁵***but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things*** into Him who is the head -- Christ --¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul identified undiscerning persons as “children” in need of growth who are *“tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”* Again, to improve in the ability to discern is to move toward spiritual maturity.

Now, the main deficiency of these Christians was that they were ***“not accustomed to the word of righteousness.”*** We should probably not understand the phrase, the “word of righteousness” as a direct reference to Scripture, but rather to the body of teaching, in other words, doctrine, which was “Christian”-

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2 also speaks of “milk” as the basic teachings of the Christian faith. There we read, “And I, Brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.”

-the content of “the faith” of Christianity. This “word of righteousness” was to be the standard by which they were to make judgments. However, they were “unaccustomed”, or unfamiliar with it, and as a result they were unable to distinguish “good from evil.” Due to their ignorance of the substance of their faith--Christian doctrine--and their failure to apply it--to distinguish “good from evil”--they were endangering themselves.

The New Testament writers frequently described in other terms what the writer to the Hebrews identified as “the word of righteousness.” Repeatedly the New Testament gives reference to a collection of teachings (i.e. doctrines), which was entrusted to Christians to maintain and pass on to the next generation. This body of teaching is described in various ways. It is “the word” which was handed down by “eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:1, 2) and preached to the early church (1 Peter 1:25). This teaching was described as “the truth” (2 Tim. 2:18), the “traditions” he had passed on to the church of the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:15), and “the faith” or “the things you have learned and become convinced of” (2 Tim. 3:8, 14). Jude wrote of “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” which needed to be contended for lest the message be lost through corruption of its content (Jude 3, 4).

One of the most dangerous and harmful notions among Christians today is that believers are not to make judgments respecting other people. It is said commonly, “I am not to judge,” or, it may be worded like this: “who am I to judge?” With this wrong view of the teaching of Scripture and wrong manner in which we relate to one another, we have forfeited God’s means of correcting much error and recovering many deceived and straying persons. In today’s churches Christians have purposely ceased to exercise thinking respecting questionable practices and persons. This “judge not” attitude has now become so “normal” that there is reluctance or refusal to confront Christians when they are seen acting in some blatantly sinful manner; to do so would be perceived as being *judgmental*. And so there is very little true exhorting one another; consequently, there is much hardness (insensitivity) among us due to the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). This is the work of the devil among us. He has led many to fail, even refuse to perform the work of discernment. If your attitude toward the world and Christians about you is never judge, never rebuke, never correct, or condemn, then you are of little real service in God’s kingdom. You are unable to provide true spiritual assistance to those about you. Perhaps you can provide comfort for others for having shared in their misery, but you will be unable to bring them to experience deliverance from their condition. But further, you yourself are *easy* prey to a deceiver; you will be *easily* led into false doctrine, for you will be readily beguiled by false teachers.

“But does not the Word of God say in Matthew 7:1, ‘*Judge not lest ye be judged*?’” Yes, but that verse and others like it is not condemning the work of discernment; rather, it is condemning a *ensorious* spirit, which is seen in one who, with a spirit of anger or intolerance, tries to dismiss or discredit other persons in order to damage their reputation or to justify himself.

Now the Scriptures do tell us that we are incapable of judging the desires and motives of hearts; that is something only God can and will one day do. But we are *commanded* to make assessments, that is, judgments, respecting ours and others’ attitudes, actions, and general character. The Bible commands us to be discerning people, and we are incapable of governing ourselves or of truly helping others if we are unable to do so. King Solomon became the wisest man who ever lived, apart from the Lord Jesus, because he sought wisdom from the Lord. “*So Give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?*” (1 Kings 3:9). Solomon could not rule his people without wisdom, and we cannot govern our lives without wisdom.

The writer to the Hebrews declared the same principle that Paul expressed in his writings: Discernment is when the Christian employs his knowledge of sound doctrine, or “the faith”, to identify and distinguish truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil. It is the accumulated practice of employing this method of discernment that leads to becoming a mature Christian. The one who has failed or refused to employ doctrine in his assessment of matters, is unable to handle the meat of the word; he can only struggle with milk, which in this context is not a good thing, but rather a criticism. The writer had said of his readers, “by this time you ought to be teachers.”

In Romans 16:17-21, Paul was asserting the same truth regarding discernment and the need to distinguish between good and evil. A right understanding of sound doctrine would enable them not to be deceived by false teachers, for they would be “wise” to what is good, thereby being to distinguish that which was evil. If they would follow his instruction, he could assure them, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

Paul closed this exhortation with the words, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”, as we will. “May the grace of our God be with us all. Amen.”