

Romans 16:17-27 Sermon Manuscript  
“Is Jesus Your Everything?”

Well we come to the very last sermon in our approximately 9 months in the book of Romans. And if you’ve noticed when we read our Scripture for today, that the very last command Paul gives to the church is a warning against false teachers. It might seem odd that the very last command that Paul gives to the churches of Rome in this letter is a sobering one and not necessarily a positive or encouraging one. You might think a book of the Bible shouldn’t end with our hairs being raised and making us be on the alert. But it is “not uncommon” for some of the books of the Bible to end on a more sobering note against false teachers. Here are some examples. A previous book we have went over does that, in 1 Timothy 6:20-21, *“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, turning aside from godless and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge which some, while professing, have gone astray from the faith.”* The ending of Titus in Titus 3:10-11 *“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”* The ending of 2 Peter in 2 Peter 3:16-18 speaks of the *“untaught and unstable”* who distort the Scriptures to their own destruction. And Peter says in verse 17 *“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest you, having been carried away by the error of unprincipled men, fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

This is not speaking about false teachers but a warning against idolatry, but in 1 John 5, the very last verse the apostle John says, *“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”* Jude warns about divisive people towards the end of his letter in Jude 1:17-19 saying, *“But you, beloved, must remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.” These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, not having the Spirit.”* And finally, who can forget the words in the last book of our Bibles, the book of Revelation, which warns against adding or taking away from Scripture, which of course false teachers often do. Revelation 22:18-19 says, *“I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”*

Now if you were presented with the book of Romans with all the verses ripped out, with the start of Romans starting in verse 17 of chapter 16, verse 17 would not make sense. But if you’ve been tracking with us from the beginning of this series, this warning against false teachers would make much more sense to you, because you have seen the glorious reality of Jesus’ love for us demonstrated for us on that cross. Romans 5:8 *“But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* Christ didn’t die for us when we were righteous, because Romans chapter 3 tells us there is none righteous, no not one, there is no one who does good. No, He died while we were sinners! In other words, He died precisely *because we were sinners, and because we are not good, and because we are not righteous, and because we can never be righteous on our own merits.* And in this glorious love, we see the glory of the power of the gospel to save us in making unrighteous, hell deserving sinners like us

righteous, forgiven, and born again as a new creature, based on the merit of Jesus Christ for us. And because of this glorious redemption that Christ has purchased for us by His own blood, His church, the gathering together of saints, is born where there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, for they are all one in Christ. And as this new entity called the church, we are able to love and serve each other so that other believers may be built up in Christ and that nonbelievers may be pointed to the salvation that is in Christ. And last week we saw Paul's heart and affection for the believers in Rome whom he has not met for the most part. We see his command for the churches in Rome to greet and welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ. From verses 1 through 16, Paul commands us to warmly greet all the believers he lists by name.

But then we come to verses 17 and 18, where we get a stark contrast to the love and affection that Paul has just commanded us to show to each other, at least initially it seems stark. Verses 17-18: *"Now I urge you, brothers, to keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and stumblings contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Jesus Christ but of their own stomach, and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."* This is a warning against false teachers that come into or arise within the church. Jesus warned us that as we get closer to the end times, we will see an increase of false teachers and teachers who will think in their delusion that they are Christ Himself. Usually, these people are very charismatic and very smooth with their tongue. They are good communicators, and they have that natural ability to create their own followers after them. And they usually lead astray those who are "unsuspecting," those who take these false teachers at their word saying they are Christians, that because they are kind, and charismatic, and gifted in many ways, they can't be false teachers or they can't possibly be coming into our church with deceptive or impure motives.

But it is when we let our guard down and take the bait when the sharp fang of the hook pierces into your flesh. Often what seems appealing, attractive, and nice to our senses and heart is a deceptive hook. Concerning false teachers, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that *"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."* And here's why verses like verses 17 and 18 exist: Here it is: *The reason why we must be vigilant to be on the alert for false teachers that come into our church is because we must protect that which we cherish and love.* They are like an invasive species that comes into a harmonious ecosystem and creates chaos. Do you know why the government is sometimes willing to pay people living in a certain state to eradicate an invasive species that has come into that ecosystem (like eradicating nutria rats in Louisiana)? It's not a trick question. Do you know why? Because it has the potential, or already is, ruining the ecosystem, and harmony, and balance that the animals/plants were having with each other. They're invasive! And just like an invasive species preying on weaker creatures, false teachers, energized by the lust of their appetites whether for greed or sexual lust or the lust for power, will try to pounce on unsuspecting sheep in the flock. Now I'm not implying that we should eradicate false teachers with shotguns and rifles in the church, (although I'm sure some would prefer to do it that way)! Although maybe the nerf crew can pelt him, slam fire style, with foam bullets. Now Bethel, we are at a good place as a church in our love and unity with one another. I think overall, we have a pretty good report of us when our church is mentioned in the community. But there is a potential for that to be disrupted by our own disobedience and sin. And that's why verses 19-20 says this: *"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."*

Even though the churches of Rome were dealing with issues of Jewish and Gentile relation, for the most part they were doing well when it came to serving and loving one another. And that reputation became known to not only other churches/other believers, but to other non-believers as well in the community. So Paul rejoices over them as a result of their testimony of love and faithfulness to a watching world, but, BUT... he says to the churches of Rome, *"I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil."* In other words, be careful o church of Rome, that your obedience is not hindered by what you expose yourself be mindful and watchful that you have precious unity and precious love that can be easily wrecked by sin. And be careful o church in Rome that your marvelous testimony of unity to the Roman world is not eclipsed by a disastrous disunity. Because as we know the greater and bigger the platform for any Christian ministry or leader is, the potential for greater damage to the name of Christ exists if that ministry falls into sin. "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." So therefore, let us expose ourselves to what is wise in the Lord, and avoid exposing yourself to what is evil and sinful in God's sight.

Now what does this look like in a practical sense? Well I think this looks like not toeing the line of sin that could draw you away from God, but living in such a way that draws you closer to God. I think of the example of dating. The age-old question when it comes to dating is, "how far is too far when it comes to physical touch and affection for your significant other?" Wrong question, the question is not "how far it too far," or "how far can I go physically without it being sin?" but "how pure can I be?" and "how far can I go to honor my significant other's purity and my own purity?" If we're honest with ourselves, most of us know and will admit that's it's hard and frustrating to stop at just a sensual touch or just a kiss before marriage because God designed physical touch and intimacy to lead to the ultimate form of physical intimacy: sex.

So for those of you who will date someone or are dating someone, it's best to avoid intimate physical contact as much as possible not because you are being legalistic about it, but because God says *"be wise in what is good and be innocent in what is evil"* and when we try to enjoy sensual or sexual intimacy with a person that is not our wife or husband, we are not being pure but sinning. Because before you engaged in that physical intimacy, you were innocent to sexual immorality, you didn't know what it's like, how it feels, etc. But once you open that door to intimacy before the right time, the sinful passions of your flesh will be awakened to know evil, just like how Eve was awakened to the knowledge of good and evil and experienced what it is like to rebel and sin against God. Yes sex and sexual intimacy is good in God's eyes, but it becomes a corrupt thing when it is done outside the realm of marriage. Sex and sexual passion is like a bonfire in a firepit. When that fire is contained within the confines of that firepit, it gives warmth and beauty and light to those around it. But as soon as that fire escapes the confines of that firepit, it becomes an incredibly destructive force, consuming everything in its path. Similarly sex within marriage is beautiful and good and gives glory to God. But sex outside of marriage is like a fire that is let out of its firepit and sets ablaze the forest in destructive fury. That's why the bride in the Song of Solomon urges the daughters of Jerusalem to not awaken love out of its proper context, because love is both powerful and precious. She says in Song of Solomon 8:4 *"I call you to solemnly swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, Why should you arouse or awaken my love Until she pleases?"*

Now before you jump to conclusions, hear me out. I don't bring up the issue of purity in dating or relationships because I am a stellar model of that. I have stumbled in my own dating life. If you were to ask my mom what my dating life was like throughout the years, she would probably say I was a "hopeless lover boy." And along with that I don't bring up the issue of purity in dating and relationships to make you feel condemned or feel more guilty than the guilt and shame you may have for your past relationships. We're all in the same boat here. I'm not standing up here saying this because I am more pure or more holy than you are. But if all of us who did stumble in that area had a chance to run it back, I think we would do it more honorably and in purity. Hardly anyone will look back at their stumblings and impurities in their past relationships and say, "man I wish I would have gone further with that person before I got married to them!" No, it's usually the opposite. If we could reverse time back and had the chance to redo our dating, or courtship, of what have you, I think most of us would say we would have done less rather than more when it comes being physical with the person we were dating. Because we know that when we say "I do" on that marriage altar, it would be all the more sweeter and precious. This area is an area of our lives that we can easily "not" be innocent to its potential evils. But it's not just in the area of sex that you can be exposed to evil. There's all sorts of things in the world we live in that are temptations to sin and invitations to be corrupted. In the area of entertainment, going to certain stores or businesses, you name it, the list goes on. Lest we forget that the reason why we struggle with our sin and why false teachers constantly infiltrate the church, verse 20 is there to remind us of the one who started it all. The one who is behind all the evil and sin and striving that we see. Verse 20 *"And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."*

Whether it's the temptation to go too far in your intimacy with the person you are dating, or whether it's false teachers coming into the church to deceive and flatter the hearts of many, all of that is energized not only by the sinful passions of the flesh, but by the forces of this present darkness. Ephesians 6:12 says that *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."* Satan hates God, hates the Holy Spirit, hates the gospel, hates the Son of God, and hates the church for which the Son of God gave His life for and he will do anything to keep Christ followers from following Christ. If he can't directly attack, He will indirectly attack God through hurting and maiming His people. And yet, despite how Satan has held a stronghold of sin over the minds of those who are perishing, he just gets a blip of a mention in one verse out of all the 433 verses that are in the book of Romans. Like an insignificant side character that shows up for a cameo appearance in a movie for a split second, Satan shows his face just for a moment. Wait, shouldn't Satan have more recognition? Shouldn't God give a little bit more credit to Him? After all he is the father of lies and the ancient dragon of old that is God's enemy....Nope....All he gets is one line in the book of Romans. Why? Because to equate and compare Satan's attempt to overthrow God's plan of redemption is like trying to compare an ant thinking he could overthrow a stampeding herd of angry elephants in the African safari. Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest theological minds to have existed, called Satan *"the greatest blockhead the world has ever known."* One pastor said about Satan that although Satan is exceedingly knowledgeable and cunning, he was also supremely stupid to suppose that he could out-think the all wise God or overpower the almighty. We don't have to worry about evil winning the day or about the possibility of Satan undoing our salvation,

because Christ defeated sin in His crucifixion and defeated death and all other evil powers in His resurrection. So we can have confidence and look forward to when the devil will ultimately be no more, when the God of peace will crush our adversary under our feet.

And we come to the final verses of the book of Romans, verses 21-27 *Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.] Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the Gentiles, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen."*

So we come full circle to that phrase the "obedience of faith." We were once disobedient in our unrighteousness and sin, but now the good news is revealed to all of us, telling us that there is a way to be righteous in His sight. There is a way to be obedient to God...not by our works, not by our goodness, not by our will, not by our flesh, but solely based on receiving the grace of God through faith in the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. We're not talking about a perfect obedience to the faith as we know based on Romans 7 and from our own experiences that Christians often struggle with in their sin. And we know that we will still sin and be sinners until Christ calls us home or He returns to rapture us to Himself. But the "obedience of faith" is talking about a heart of obedience, a posture of obedience. Do you desire and long to obey Jesus Christ and be more and more progressively sanctified in your obedience to Him? And ultimately, the level of your obedience will show how much you love Jesus Christ. Disciples of Christ who are the most obedient in the faith are those who love Jesus Christ the most. Do you love Him? Do you adore Him? Do you see Him as precious and as your everything? I remember one person I was talking to about his spiritual state before the Lord told me something to the extent of, "I know Jesus is some things in life, but He can't be everything in life." And to that I say, Jesus is NOT some things in life, He is everything in life. That's why Romans concludes with all praise, adoration, and glory going back to God; *"to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever, Amen."* So...Is Jesus your everything? [pray]