

INI - SDG

November 16, 2008  
26<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Trinity  
Hecla

**Text: Romans 16:17-20 *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.***

Theme: BE WISE AND SIMPLE CHRISTIANS

- Wise in what is good
- Simple concerning evil

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Though the Vietnam War ended over 30 years ago, the effects of the war are still present in modern day Vietnam. It is estimated that there several million unexploded land-mines or bombs that are scattered throughout the countryside of Vietnam. It is not uncommon for a Vietnamese farmer to be working in his field and either lose a limb or die when his shovel or tractor strikes a land-mine. Imagine if you walking in your family's field and you came across a land-mine. What would you do? Would you just go about your business and ignore it? No way! If you ignore it, you or another family member might come across it later and be killed by it. Instead, knowing how dangerous they are, you would put some sort of marker by it so that you and your family members would know to avoid it.

As Paul concludes his letter to the Romans he has words of warning about spiritual land-mines that exist in this world. But these spiritual land-mines do not just maim or kill the body, they wreak havoc on a person's soul. These spiritual land-mines are false teachings. Teachings by which man either adds to or takes away from God's word. And so Paul warns the Romans and us about marking and noting such spiritual land-mines.

But along with the words of warning, we also find words of encouragement in our text. Paul says that he is glad to hear about the obedience of the Christians in Rome. Paul wants them to be wise and simple Christians. Wise when it comes to good things and simple or pure concerning evil things. The Holy Spirit has preserved these words for us today, that we would hear them and faithful apply to our lives today. May God help us to that end. Amen.

### WISE IN WHAT IS GOOD

Paul writes in verse 19 of our text, ***"I want you to be wise in what is good."*** What is your definition of "good." Today's popular opinion is that "good" is relative. What may be "good" to one person, is not necessarily so for another. We are told that there are a lot of grey areas in life and there is no definite good or bad. Some people believe that we should do whatever feels good. That if something feels good, it can't be wrong. So if so-called "alternative

lifestyles” such as homosexuality feels good for you, then that is your “good.” If enacting revenge on someone who has hurt you feels good, then that is good to that person. If violence, sex, alcohol, or drugs makes you feel good - then that is what is good to another person.

But there are no grey areas when it comes to God. God has told us what is good in His Word. In our study of Romans we have heard of some of the things that God says are good. We heard that when it comes to our weak brethren and matters of adiaphora, that we should bear with them and put their needs and concerns ahead of our own. That is good. We heard in chapter 13 that subjecting to and obeying the government is good. We even heard that it is good to pay our taxes. In chapter 12 we heard that it is good to make use of the gifts God has given each one of us to the glory of God and for the benefit of the Church. In chapter 10 we heard that it is good to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We need only look to the 10 Commandments to find what is good in God’s sight. From them we learn that it is good to use God’s name - to call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. We learn that it is good to go unto the house of the Lord - to receive His blessing and worship Him. We learn that it is good to honor our father and mother. We learn that it is good to help our neighbor and be a friend to him in every bodily need. God says that these are good things - let us be wise in them! Let us know them and by the aid of the Holy Spirit apply them to our lives!

In our Old Testament less we heard that God wants His word to be preached - but He wants it to be preached faithfully. He does not want man to add anything to His Word or to take away from His Word. Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** (2 Tim 4:2) It is through His Word that the Holy Spirit comes into the hearts of people. Through His Word God works faith in Jesus Christ. It is through His Word that God rescues souls from unbelief and fires of hell. It is good to preach the Word of God and to preach it faithfully.

#### SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL

Unfortunately not all have the same desire to be wise in what is good. We know that evil is present in this world. It probably wasn’t long after the seventh day of creation that we find evil presenting itself in God’s perfect creation. In the Garden of Eden Satan tempts Eve to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. Evil is everything which is contrary to the word and will of God.

Again in verse 20 of our text Paul writes, **“I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning what is evil.”** The word “simple” which Paul uses here literally means to be “unmixed.” The Greeks would use this word when speaking of wine that did not have any water mixed in with it. It would be “simple” or unmixed wine. So Paul says to us that when it comes to evil WE should be simple or unmixed. Don’t be mixed together with evil things.

Satan’s attack on the good things of God began by assaulting the Word of God. And in 6,000 years his methods really haven’t changed. When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden he began by saying, **“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’”** (Gen 3:1) Are you SURE, Eve, that God REALLY said that? It is the evil work of Satan to cause one to doubt the Word of God.

Satan also loves to use the Word of God and twist it to fit according to his evil purposes. When Satan was tempting Jesus he took Him to the highest point of the temple and said to Him, **“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against**

*a stone.*' " (Mt 4:6) These are things God had promised in His Word - protection and safety. But God never intended man to use them in a suicidal fashion as to tempt God. So Satan quoted from Scripture, but he twisted it to fit his evil schemes.

The assaults of Satan on the children of God have not changed. Satan knows how powerful the Word of God is. Satan knows that by the Word faith is created and sustained in your hearts. So Satan wants you doubt God's Word - "Did REALLY die for all of your sins?" "Did God REALLY say that babies are to be baptized as infants?" "Did God REALLY say that even a little false teaching is bad? Isn't it better after all to just ignore doctrinal differences for the sake of unity?"

Satan also loves to twist Scripture to confuse us. Take for instance the Sacrament of the Altar or Lord's Supper. Christ gave us Lord's Supper and with these simple words "***This is My body...this is My blood***" promised His real presence in this meal. He gives us His body and His blood under the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink. He gives us Himself to strengthen of our faith. But Satan also loves to twist these words. "Sure, Jesus said, 'This IS My body...this IS My blood.' But surely 'is' doesn't mean 'really present' but instead 'like' or 'represents.' Jesus doesn't really give you His body and blood in the sacrament - He can't since He's in heaven." So Satan seeks to deprive the blessings of real presence in the Lord's Supper. Such things are evil in God's sight.

These are the assaults on God's Word which Satan brings through false teachings. Throughout the Scriptures, God warns us of the spiritual land-mines left by false teachers. In our Old Testament lesson, the LORD said, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" In our Gospel lesson we heard Jesus tell us to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. The Apostle John writes in his first epistle, "***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.***" (1 Jn 4:1) The Christian needs to be on his guard against any who would add to or take away from God's Word.

And then in our text, Paul pleads with his audience, ***Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*** Divisions and offenses are not caused by true teaching or true doctrine. They are caused in the Christian church by men who do not teach God's Word faithfully. Either they take away from God's Word or add to it with their own teachings. And so they cause divisions in congregations and church bodies by their false teachings. They also cause offenses or spiritual stumbling blocks by their false teachings.

Every false teaching is an assault on Jesus Christ and the simple Gospel message. Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures, "***These are they which testify of Me.***" (Jn 5:39) The focal point of all Scripture is Jesus death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. God's desired goal throughout all of Scripture is to lead us to see our true condition before Him - lost and condemned - and then to show us the only way to heaven, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. When someone adds to or takes away from God's Word, they affect this ultimate goal of salvation through the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

False teachers, therefore, do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ, but only themselves. They are belly-servers, looking to make a name or riches for themselves. Their teachings sound good. With smooth words and flattering speech they gain men for themselves and lead them away from God and His Word.

False teaching is like a spiritual land-mine and our reaction must be the same when we come across it. The Apostle urges us to mark them and avoid them. Their teachings are evil. Let us be simple, pure, and unmixed with such evil by avoiding any spiritual fellowship with them. This avoiding includes all forms of worshipping together - such as singing hymns and praying with them. This is done out of love for Jesus who wants His word taught faithfully and out of love for those souls who do not see the danger of any false teaching.

While we recognize the evil that Satan has brought into the world, we also rejoice to hear the words of Paul in the last verse of our text - ***“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”*** God promises to give us the final victory over the forces of evil through our Lord Jesus Christ. It will come shortly - before you know it, when the trumpet sounds and our Savior returns. Until that great day we have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have His undeserved love toward us. Love that caused Him to be our Substitute for sin by suffering and dying in our place. We have His grace which overcame that great enemy of death. Rest securely in the God of peace and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be wise in what is good. Search the Scriptures to find out what is the will of our heavenly Father. And let us continue by the grace of God to be simple or unmixed concerning evil. May God help each one of us to this end. Amen.