

DIVISIONS

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” (Rom. 16:17-18)

When Paul dictated this letter to Rome it was the capital of the world. An estimated one million people lived there and they were a melting pot of races, creeds, and nationalities. When these people became Christians, their differences created controversies in the church. Therefore Paul emphasized the need for love and unity and warned against those who caused divisions.

Please consider:

- **“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.” (Rom. 6:6-7)**
- **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Rom. 12:2)**
- **“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Rom. 12:3-5)**
- **“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Rom. 12:9-10)**
- **“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (Rom. 12:13)**
- **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.” (Rom. 12:14)**
- **“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” (Rom. 12:16)**
- **“Do not repay anyone with evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.” (Rom. 12:17)**
- **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Rom. 12:18)**
- **“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:20-21)**
- **“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Rom. 13:8-10)**

- **“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” (Rom. 14:1-4)**
- **One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Rom. 14:5-8)**
- **“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” (Rom. 14:10)**
- **“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.” (Rom. 14:13)**
- **“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17)**
- **“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Rom. 14:19)**
- **“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” (Rom. 15:1-4)**
- **“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 15:5-6)**
- **“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God.” Rom. 15:7)**
- **I myself am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, competent in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” (Rom. 15:14)**

This brief survey of Romans 12 – 16 provides context to Paul’s warning regarding those who cause divisions. Those who cause divisions in the Body of Christ are not serving the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own selfish appetites. Certainly, we need to avoid such people! After teaching them over and over again how to be unified and overcome their differences, this inspired warning of Paul comes sharply into focus!

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