

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Watch Out For Divisive People

By Dan Trygg

“If anyone teaches-other-doctrine, and does not come to sound words, to the ones of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine according to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited (wrapped-in smoke) and understands nothing; but having-a-sick-interest in controversies and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.” 1 Timothy 6:3-5

“But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ Reject (lit., ‘beg-off-from’; decline-to-listen-to) a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” Titus 3:9-11

“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” Romans 16:17-20

When you follow Paul’s ministry in the book of Acts, and his epistles, it is very evident that he had to deal with false and divisive teachings wherever he went. There are numerous passages describing their characteristics, and some of what they were advocating. *The Lord Jesus also said that false teachers, and even fake “Christ’s”, would rise up* to lead people astray throughout the entire church age, until He returns again (e.g., Matt. 7:15-20; 24:4,5,11,23-27). **The apostle Peter warns of false teachers** that would come among them (2 Pet. 2:1-22). **John refers to them as “anti-christs” and “deceivers”** (1 Jn. 2:18-22; 2 Jn. 1:7-11), and warns that they are “already out in the world”. In Acts 20:29,30, **Paul warned the elders from the church in Ephesus that “savage wolves would come in among them” from outside the group, and “from among your own selves people will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples away after them.”** He spoke these words to them shortly after he wrote the letter to the Romans, as he was on his way to bring the offering to Jerusalem that he referred to in Romans 15:25-32. **Clearly, dealing with false teachers and divisive people is a reality we should expect. It is important to train disciples to watch for such people, ...especially leaders. Paul also helped to prepare believers to know how to respond to such people.**

Remember, in the early church in Jerusalem that there was a training regimen which new believers were directed to follow. They were continually devoting themselves “to the doctrine of the apostles, and to the sharing, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). **New Christians were schooled in the distinctive teachings of the apostles, ...those teachings they had learned from Jesus directly and those that the Holy Spirit was guiding them to understand.** Early on, these teachings were repeated and passed along through the leaders of these home groups, and came to be fairly well recognized as the “healthy teachings, the ones according to godliness”. When you compare the teachings of individual authors in the NT, it is amazing how much they are in agreement with each other. **The “doctrine of the apostles” was what had been set forth in the early Jerusalem church, and spread along with the expansion of the Christian movement.** Furthermore, **the apostles themselves eventually left the Jerusalem church and began travelling about to reinforce these fundamental teachings** that formed the backbone of early Christianity. Eventually, the Holy Spirit led the apostles, and their close associates of that first generation (e.g., Mark, Luke), to write down not only the doctrines of the apostles, but also accounts of Jesus’ ministry. These writings became widely distributed and used by home churches around the Empire, and eventually were collected and incorporated as our New Testament scriptures.

The “doctrine of the apostles” which included the teachings and actions of Jesus, formed the standard of “sound words” or “healthy-teachings” that other teachings were measured against. (Note that another description is “the teaching that is in accordance with godliness”. The word for “godliness” literally means “good-devotedness”. This gets at the heart of true, healthy Christianity – intimacy with God.) **Thus, we find in 1 Timothy 6 that Paul says that if anyone were to teach any “other-doctrine”, he (or she) is unhealthy.** He (or she) is conceited. (Interesting word-picture here. He is “wrapped in smoke”, ...obviously not able to see clearly!) He (or she) “understands nothing.” He is **“being-sick concerning debates and arguments about words”**. **Look at all the destructive and divisive results that come from this unhealthy focus** on “questionable things” – Envy, ...strife, ...abusive, injurious speech, ...evil, unfounded-conjectures. **Can you see how destructive these things would be to the interactive Body-life that is supposed to happen when we meet?** Instead of being able to “express-the-truth in love”, these people *only want to promote their “pet-theology”*. Instead of “building one another up”, they *debate, contend and sow fear and unfounded suspicions* about things that cannot

even be proven. They are caught up in their own sickness, ...and may also pull others into their foolishness, ...OR they may cause division by alienating those who do not see things their way. Instead of unity and peace, *they cause friction and irritation*, especially among others whose minds have been ruined or deprived of the truth. Such false teachers keep these people stuck in controversy. **There are many “hooks” used by such false teachers.** The one Paul mentions here in 1 Timothy 6 is **the supposition that their devotion to this belief will bring them wealth.** Again, if they knew the healthy teachings, ...the teachings in accordance with the good-devotedness Jesus and the apostles taught..., then they would know that this promise is inconsistent with the life, teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles.

In the Titus passage, we have another context where Paul talks about “foolish debates and strife”, but here he adds “genealogies” and “quarrels about the Law”. All these contentions and arguments are “without profit and worthless” (3:9). Note again that the promoter of such ideas is “corrupt” (lit., “turned aside”, as turned aside from truth), but here Paul adds that he or she is “sinning, being self-condemned” (vs. 11). This sounds like they have a sense that what they are doing is wrong, but they continue doing it anyway. Here, Paul gives us some practical counsel: *Avoid such arguments.* The Greek is literally “go around” them. Then, in verse 10 he tells us to “reject a factious person, after a first and second warning”. The word for “reject” means literally to “beg-off-from”. It means to excuse yourself from talking with that person. Avoid conversations with such a person, ...at least if they begin to go down that road again. This has two benefits: (1.) It keeps us from wasting our time in profitless discussion; and (2.) It prevents that person from getting the “payoff” of our attention. Part of the sickness involved here is a desire to be the center of attention, to present oneself as a know-it-all, or as someone who knows something you don’t know, to impress or control others. By turning away from this person, you cut off this “payoff”. This may be a way to motivate change.

In the Romans 16 passage, Paul admonishes US ALL to keep our eyes open for those who cause dissensions and stumbling-blocks that are contrary to, or go beyond, the “doctrine that you learned” (that healthy, apostolic doctrine). **This is NOT just the job for leaders. It is the responsibility of us all to watch out for each other.** You may see something much sooner than it would come to the attention of a leader. God has brought to your attention so you can intervene, in some way. Note that it is not just the divisive people we are to watch out for, but also “stumbling blocks”. These are people who either trip other people up, or bring a bad reputation to the Body of Christ by their own behavior, because they are living in sin. **Paul counsels us to “turn away from” such divisive people. He then adds another insight: He says that such ones are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites** (lit., bellies – cf. Phil. 3:18,19). **They are getting something out of this!** It is satisfying a lust for attention, or power. Or, maybe they are intending to get money from you somehow. Paul says that it is by their smooth talk and flattering speech they lead astray the hearts of the unsuspecting (lit., ‘without evil’ – Their hearts are innocent, so they are easily duped.). **These divisive people are good at talking.** Their presentation can be great, but their information is faulty. The Greek could also be translated as “by their kind, friendly words and blessings” they lead people astray. **They might be attractive because they are “the nicest people”, but they are promoting a lie! Do NOT be led astray!**

Paul explains his concern for them. He commends them for their obedience, which has been recounted and celebrated widely. For that reason, he rejoices over them, but he is also is concerned for them. He wants them to be wise (‘skillful’) toward the good, but untainted (unmixed; pure-in-integrity) toward the evil and sick. (Note that this is not just about moral good versus moral evil; it is about healthy versus unhealthy.) **Paul has been around the block plenty of times. He knows that there is a spiritual war going on out there** (Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He knows that if they have been healthy and fruitful for Christ, that **Satan will try to introduce destructive heresies, or divisive lies, or distracting diversions, or false brethren, or infectious soul-sickness.** In light of that inevitability, **Paul wants them to maintain, and deepen, their healthy focus, ...and be watchful toward any attempt to infiltrate and divide them.** If they do *that*, he expects that God will smash Satan’s schemes to pieces under their feet, and He will do it *quickly!*

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” It is all about the grace of God through Jesus Christ! It is by grace we have been saved from our sins, ...we are saved to have access to God and live an empowered life today, and it is by grace that God will continue to transform our lives, deliver us from the power and works of darkness and lead us into God’s purposes for us individually and corporately.

It is not enough, however, that God has given us His grace in Jesus Christ, we must accept and utilize that grace by faith. We must *choose to respond* to the promise of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. By grace you are saved **THROUGH FAITH!** **AND, we must choose to accept the grace of God offered to us to be co-workers together with Him, to live effectively as His servants.** “And working together with Him, we also encourage you not to accept the grace of God in vain (‘for nothing’)...” (2 Cor. 6:1).