

“Mark” and “Turn Away”

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Paul's final plea to the saints in Roman was for doctrinal purity:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them (Rom. 16:17).

This statement is not merely a polite suggestion, but an earnest entreaty with the strength of a charge, an order, or a command.

The substance of the appeal is that the pure Doctrine of Christ must be carefully preserved. The principal means of doing so were two:

1. Mark those who were causing division by their error;
2. Turn away from those brethren.

The originators and/or propagators of the divisive doctrines must be “marked” (from *skopeo*, meaning to “look [out] for, notice, keep one's eyes on someone or something” [Arndt & Gingrich]). Every Christian is to exercise this vigilance for false teachers.

How strange that anyone claiming loyalty to the Teaching and example of Christ would sympathize with purveyors of perverted doctrine. The only way some brethren “look out for” heretics is to defend them and supply their needs. Quite pitifully, many (including elders) are so ignorant of the Truth they cannot recognize error when they hear or read it.

Others count it a mark of spiritual superiority never to “keep books” or “files” on any brother. Such folk pride themselves on their ignorance of who is teaching or practicing strange things, thinking that such self-imposed ignorance somehow nullifies the errors or at least, their taking any action concerning them. A generation of ignoring instead of taking note by a large number of brethren has produced predictable widespread apostasy.

Some argue that “branding” is not in Paul's command to “mark.” This observation is true concerning this one word. However, the very act of taking note of false teachers so as to be able to avoid them demands that they be branded/exposed. This was the Lord's practice (Mat. 16:6). Paul's charge has no meaning if his aim was not the identity and exposure of the divisive errorists.

These teachers are not to be listened to or extended any treatment that implies endorsement (cf. Tit. 3:10; 2 John 10–11). Preachers, congregations, and universities, and schools

of preaching are rightly judged by the company they keep. If many of our brethren had not been too sophisticated and “bleeding-heart” tolerant to obey Paul's instruction in this matter since the 1970s, most of the liberal element could have been isolated and its damage minimal. Instead, heretics have been allowed – and continue – to circulate with freedom and acceptance in a large portion of the church like ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing among lambs.

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