

“Mark” and “Turn Away From...”

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Paul's final plea to the saints in Rome 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 errors
2. Turn away from such 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 error or at least, their duty to take 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 claim is true concerning this one word. However, the act of taking note of false teachers to enable one 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, universities, and schools of preaching are rightly judged by the company they keep. If so many brethren had not been too

sophisticated and tolerant to obey Paul's instruction in this matter since the 1970s, most of the liberal element could have been isolated and its damage rendered minimal. Instead, heretics were (and are) allowed to circulate with great freedom and acceptance among the brethren. All such are ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing in the Lord's flock (Mat. 7:15; Acts 20:28-31). They must not only be marked and identified. Their errors must also be exposed and refuted (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

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