

Marks of Christian Community Pt. 2

Unity, Joy, and Hope

Romans 16:17-20

Introduction

As Paul begins to conclude his letter to the Romans, he offers a final warning. He encourages the believers to be discerning, obedient, trusting in God's promised victory.

The Aim

To encourage believers to be discerning, obedient, and hopeful.

Outline

A. Discernment keeps the community United (vv. 17-18)

i. Explanation:

1. Paul making a final "appeal" (cp. 12:1; 15:30). Here, the appeal is to "keep an eye on" (NASB), "watch out for" (ESV, NIV, NET), "mark so as to avoid" (EGGNT), (Greek, skopeo) those who cause divisions and obstacles. Ct. Pp. 3:17.
2. Discern (Webster, 1828): "To separate by the eye, or by the understanding. Hence, to distinguish; to see the difference between two or more things... To see or understand the difference; to make distinction; as, to discern between good and evil, truth and falsehood."
3. Watch out for dissent/division and obstacles. Cd. Jew/Gentile, Apostles/Pharisees, Paul/False divides. "Obstacles" largely refer to behaviors that "create a moral prejudice against the gospel" (Nicoll).
4. "The teaching" is "all the instruction which led them to become Christians and informed them in what true Christianity consists" (Cambridge). Cp. Ep. 4:20; Pp. 4:9.
5. "Avoid" (ESV, NET), "Keep away" (NIV), "turn away" (NASB).
6. "Them" are both 'religious' or 'rebellious'
7. Note their method—"smooth talk and flattery".
8. Note their intent—division, obstacles, deceit.
9. "Naïve" is literally "not bad".

ii. Illustration:

1. Baseball strike zone. Umpires and players keep a careful "eye on the ball" to distinguish strikes from balls. Consider what an umpire must do to prepare:
 - a. "The job of a professional baseball umpire requires quick thinking, common sense, and confidence. When the ball is in play, the umpire sees the action, assesses the situation and makes the call -- all in a matter of seconds. The successful umpire has a thorough knowledge of the rulebook, is even-tempered, and is mentally strong enough to handle situations under stressful conditions. A professional umpire is expected to hustle, be alert, be in excellent physical condition, and have a neat appearance...It usually takes seven to eight years of umpiring professional baseball at the Minor League level before the umpire is considered for a position at the Major League level."
2. Farmers "keep an eye on" potential breakdowns.

iii. Application:

1. Like umpires, we must know the rules and make good decisions. We must know “the book” (Bible), be mentally strong and alert, and invest time into growing in knowledge.

B. Obedience brings the community Joy

i. Explanation:

1. Either the Romans’ obedience was known to Paul, so he appealed to them, or their obedience was proof of their “innocence/naivety”. Either way, their obedience brought Paul joy. Cd. 3 Jn. 1:4.
2. Paul is wishing for a “moral intelligence, not impaired in the least by any dealings with evil” (Nicoll). Cp. Mt. 10:16.
3. Note the difference between ‘Blind’ vs. ‘Wise’ obedience. We don’t have a “blind faith”. We have a reasonable faith that is “true and rational” (Acts 26:25)
4. Together, consider Stott’s 3 Tests of Obedience: Biblical (“doctrine” v. 17), Christological (“serve our Lord Christ” v. 18), Ethical (“wise/innocent” v. 19) (Stott, 400).
5. “...which is just the reverse of natural and unregenerate men, who are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge...” (Gill)

ii. Illustration:

1. NT church dynamics have always forced a new “status quo”. Jews learn to relate to Gentiles, slaves with freemen, rich with poor, men with women. Could add Republican with Democrats, etc. All are called to obey “the teaching” of Christ—a new society.

iii. Apply:

1. As we welcome new people to the fellowship, this becomes an issue—maintaining gospel-centered grace-based obedience. We must guard a true “gospel community” without taking away from or adding to “the teaching” of Christ.

C. Promises give the community Hope

i. Explanation:

1. Allusion to Genesis 3:15. God will defeat Satan.
2. Notice how Satan is connected with the dissenters/deceivers. He is the power behind them.
3. Explore the reality of Satan? My professor used to say “D.A.T.’s the devil”: Deceiver, Accuser, and Tempter.
4. Satan’s status is like a defeated enemy who continues to fight after the war has been won.

ii. Illustration:

1. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12).
2. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for...” (Heb. 11:1).

iii. Application:

1. We have “very great promises, that through them we may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pe. 1:4); that is, become more like Jesus.

Application

1. Consider 2 Peter 3:18. What does it mean to “grow in grace AND knowledge”? How does this relate to Paul’s warning in Romans 16?
2. What does the word “obedience” mean to you? Do you think of rules or relationship? What kind of obedience does God desire? Consider Proverbs 21:3.
3. What promises are giving you hope today?