

## “MARK... AND TURN AWAY FROM THEM”

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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” (**Romans 16:17 ASV**),

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

The implication behind and substance of the appeal is that the pure doctrine of Christ must be carefully preserved. To begin with, I note that some faithful brethren do not like the term *conservative*, saying “it's not in the Bible.” This word may not be, but its connotation and meaning are found in every passage that exalts Truth, exposes error, and warns of apostasy, as in **Romans 16:17**. For these reasons, I do not hesitate to refer to those who are zealous to conserve or preserve pristine Truth as conservatives,” and I am not the least bit embarrassed at being so labeled.

Paul stated an undeniable fact: Error and its promoters divide brethren. Truth-lovers will always oppose it, but the untaught, uncommitted, and ungodly will uphold it. Thus error divides those once united in Truth.

Paul specifies two essential means of preserving the Truth in a congregation or in the entire kingdom; (1) “MARK” those who were causing division by their error, and (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, but elders have a special responsibility in this regard (**Acts 20:28-31**).

We are under Scriptural mandate to “TURN AWAY FROM” (i. e., cease to fellow ship, refuse [**Ephesians 5:11**; **Titus 3:10**]) those who teach and/or practice that which is unauthorized by the inspired Word (**Colossians 3:17**).

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

Some argue that “branding” does not inhere in *skopeo*—granted, However what is the point of noting false teachers if not to both “brand” and avoid them? This was the Lords practice: “TAKE HEED AND BEWARE OF THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES” (**Matthew 16:6**). Paul's charge has no meaning if his aim was not the identity and exposure of the divisive errorists.

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

We are not to listen to or extend any treatment that implies endorsement of such a brother (cf. **Titus 3:10**; **2 John 10-11**). Rather, we are to turn away from, avoid him. I fail to see how this charge allows one knowingly to appear on the same lecture platforms, shake hands with, eat with, and converse with such—all in an atmosphere of amiable fellowship and camaraderie. Preachers, congregations, universities, and schools of preaching are rightly judged by the company they keep. If many of our brethren had not become too sophisticated and “bleeding-heart” tolerant to obey Paul’s instruction in this matter a few decades ago, most of the liberal clement would have been isolated and its damage minimized. Heeding Paul’s injunction would have prevented the avalanche of change-agent apostasy that has carried the majority of the church backward into a new religious Dark Age. Instead, heretics have been (and continue to be) allowed to circulate with freedom and acceptance in a large portion of the church, like the ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing Jesus said they are (**Matthew 7:15-16**).

And, as 2003 dawned, who would have dreamed the direction a host of otherwise faithful brethren would take by the time the year was half gone? Brethren who at one time and for many years held boldly applied **Romans 16:17-18** to false teachers suddenly became pragmatists concerning an impenitent brother and his error - **Dave Miller**. They have rightly continued to mark and avoid the likes of Max Lucado, Rubel Shelly, Al Maxey, and Mac Deaver for their errors. However, for variety of reasons (e.g., preservation of a human institution [Apologetics Press], fear of losing contributions to a school of preaching, friendship, popularity, et al from June 2005 on they have given brother Miller “get out of jail free card” regarding Paul’s injunction. Consistency demands they either embrace Lucado, Shelly, Maxey, and Deaver with their errors or mark and turn away from Miller because of his errors, and for the same reason: **They are all impenitent false teachers**—just on different subjects.

Now for a great Irony; some of us who have incessantly exposed these fellowship compromisers (while begging them to meet us in fair discussions) have been forced to “mark” and “turn away” from them. Rather than repent, some of them have compounded their error by “marking” some of us. Note; They refuse to mark and turn away from a brother in open, documented error, but they willingly prostitute Paul’s order by applying it to us, whose alleged “errors” they refuse to specify. Let us continue to strive to apply the Sacred Text consistently.