

THE INTERCONTINENTAL CHURCH OF GOD

SPECIFIC BIBLE STUDIES - ROMANS 16:17-18

SUBJECT: Romans 16:17-18 - "marking them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to doctrine."

QUESTIONS: Who is Paul referring to in these verses? What does it mean to "mark" a person?

ANSWER:

Questions and Answers from Romans 16:17-18

Rom 16:17-18

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.---KJV

Question 1: **Who is Paul referring to in these verses?**

Answer: **To members of the church.**

Question 2: **What does it mean to "mark" a person?**

Answer: **This primarily is a direction by the church and ministry to inform the congregation of any member preaching outside of doctrine and/or those causing division in the church. The idea is to make the congregation aware of anyone causing such division. Notice some commentaries:**

--[**Mark them**] Observe attentively, cautiously, and faithfully (Phil 3:17); be on your guard against them. Ascertain "who are" the real causes of the divisions that spring up, and avoid them.

(from Barnes' Notes)

--[**Mark them which cause divisions**] Several MSS. read asphaloo (NT:806) skopeite (NT:4648), look sharply after them; let them have no kiss of charity nor peace, because they strive to make divisions, and thus set the flock of Christ at variance among themselves; and from these divisions, offences (skandala (NT:4625), scandals) are produced; and this is contrary to that doctrine of peace, unity, and brotherly love which you have learned. Look sharply after such that they do you no evil, and avoid them-i.e. give them no countenance, and have no religious fellowship with them. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary)

The second commentary shows clear indication that we are to avoid the dialog of these causing division. We are to keep ourselves safe from debate, argument and the media (letters, e-mails, tapes, phone calls and arguments) these people are expounding.

Question 3: **Does this mean we are to "shun" these people? Does the ICG practice shunning?**

Answer: No, the ICG does not practice nor encourage shunning (absolute breaking of relationship with this person). This fact is in our Field Church Guidelines posted here: [click here](#) It says: "It is the firm policy of the ICG that ...no minister may unilaterally bar anyone from the fellowship of the church at large, nor may he demand that a person be shunned."

Question 4: **Does the ICG have a policy regarding or practice "the disfellowshipping" of members for any reason?**

Answer: Yes we do, though this is extremely rare. In recent decades, in the greater Body of Christ, contrary members generally just leave the congregation on their own. Notice this again from the ICG Field Church Guidelines: "It is the firm policy of the ICG that while a minister may, for cause, bar a person from local church attendance, no minister may unilaterally bar anyone from the fellowship of the church at large."

Note: Notice that the minister does not disfellowship the person from the entire church organization or the Body of Christ.

This subject is also discussed in the Constitution and By-Laws of the ICG (Article IX) posted here: [click here](#) It says, in part, "Each minister or host of a fellowship group is charged with the responsibility of keeping peace in the local group, and may, as required, deny fellowship to any person who is disorderly or contentious, or who attempts to espouse contrary doctrines or practices." It also says, "The INTERCONTINENTAL CHURCH OF GOD rejects the traditional concept of "excommunication" or "marking" as practiced by various religious hierarchies."

Question 5: Should a person ever be disfellowshipped, does he or she have any recourse should they feel they were disfellowshipped unjustly?

Answer: Absolutely. Notice this from the Field Church Guidelines: "The person who has been disfellowshipped has the right of appeal to the Council and should be given a copy of the charges that have been made against him. Meanwhile, he may attend another congregation of the ICG or the annual Feast of Tabernacles at the sufferance of ministers elsewhere. A pastor who disfellowships a person may inform other pastors of his actions and the reasons for them, but it is at the sole discretion of each pastor as to whether the person may attend."

Question 6: Going back to "marking" for a moment; are we saying that the church or the ministry is responsible for keeping the flock from those causing the division and discord?

Answer: Actually, no. As we are going to see in a moment, Romans 16:18 is actually putting much of the responsibility on the individual member in these matters. For now, go back to Article IX in the Constitution and By-Laws: "Further, the IGC accepts the admonition of Paul, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark [take note of] them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). Paul wrote to the lay membership, thus placing the responsibility for avoiding heretics or unruly persons **on the shoulders of the individual.**" (emphasis mine)

Question 7: In verse 17 it says that we are to take note of (mark) them which cause divisions. What is the meaning of this word, "divisions"?

Answer: Notice the commentary: [**Divisions**] Dissensions; parties; factions; 1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:20. The very "attempt" to form such parties was evil, **no matter what the pretence.** They who attempt to form parties in the churches are commonly actuated by some evil or ambitious design.--(from Barnes' Notes) (emphasis mine)

Question 8: Again in verse 17, just what does it mean to "avoid them"?

Answer: the commentary explains this well: [**And avoid them**] Give them no countenance or approbation. Do not follow them; compare 1 Tim 6:3-5; 2 John 10; Gal 1:8-9. That is, avoid them as "teachers;" do not follow them. It does not mean that they were to be treated harshly; but that they were to be avoided in their "instructions." **They were to disregard all that they could say tending to produce alienation and strife;** and resolve to cultivate the spirit of peace and union. This would be an admirable rule if always followed. Let people make "peace" their prime object; resolve to love all who "are" Christians, and it will be an infallible gauge by which to measure the arguments of those who seek to promote alienations and contentions.--(from Barnes' Notes) (emphasis mine)

So, rather than shunning (see question 3), the member is to avoid becoming part of a faction, avoid detractors as "teachers" and avoid their "instructions" especially as they tend to produce alienation and strife regarding the church and/or individuals in the church. Regardless, the member is not to treat these people harshly. The members are to invoke love and peace in all they do, while, at the same time avoiding their dissenting words and actions.

Question 9: What is the meaning behind the first part of verse 18, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly"?

Answer: Clearly anyone bringing in false doctrines, concepts and ideas or spreading dissention and discord are not serving Christ. However, there is a clue here in what the member is to look for in anyone they suspect or witness as spreading division and discord. Simply ask yourself, is what this person is doing or saying something Christ would do or say? It goes to the age-old adage for the true Christian, "What would Christ do? AND what does the Bible say?" Notice now, what the commentary says for "but their own belly":

[**But their own belly**] Their own "lusts;" their own private interests; they do this to obtain support. The authors of parties and divisions, in church and state, have this usually in view. It is for the indulgence of some earthly appetite; to obtain function or property; or to gratify the love of dominion.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Another commentary says: **But their own belly**-not in the grosset sense, but in the sense of 'living for low ends of their own' (compare Phil 3:19); (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary)

Question 10: Now please explain the latter half of verse 18, "and by good words and fair speeches deceive...". What is meant by these phrases?

Answer: As we are about to see, these seemingly innocuous phrases are KEY to the individual church member and put most of the responsibility, in these cases of division and discord, in their hands. Let us begin with the commentaries again:

[And by good words] Mild, fair, plausible speeches; with an appearance of great sincerity, and regard for the truth; compare Col 2:4; 2 Peter 3:3. People who cause divisions commonly make great pretensions to regular love of truth and orthodoxy; and put on the appearance of great sincerity, sanctity, and humility.

Note: Like Satan appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the dissenters appear as good, God-fearing, righteous and sincere people. They appear as lovers of the brethren, of truth, of the Law and of the church.

[And fair speeches] Greek eulogias (NT:2129), eulogy, praise, flattery. This is another very common art. "Flattery" is one of the most powerful means of forming parties in the church; and "a little special attention," or promise of an office, or commendation for talents or acquirements, will secure "many" to the purposes of party whom no regard for truth or orthodoxy could influence a moment. (from Barnes' Notes)

Note: Dissenters will use any tactic to gain the support of the righteous and faithful. They will offer money, power, position and even the promise of ordination to get people to their side and to carry out their agendas.

Herein lies the responsibility to the church member. Notice:

Responsibility to the Church Member	
Righteous ministers and members	Dissident ministers and members
Use mild, fair and plausible speeches	Use the same elements
Are sincere and show sincerity	Appear to be the same
Love the truth and orthodoxy of church	Appear to love the same things
Are humble and loving	Appear to be humble and loving

Therefore, the member is not going to be able to use any of these elements to arrive at the truth in these situations. They are going to have to determine truth, itself, for truth cannot be faked. This takes us to that age-old rule of thumb that has served the church so long:

1. Is what you are seeing of Christ?
2. Would Christ have taken the action you have just witnessed?
3. Would He have uttered those words, sent that letter, brought that argument?
4. Is what you are seeing "marking" or character assassination?
5. What does the Word of God say about what you have just seen this person do or say?

Question 11: Who are most apt to be fooled by people causing the discord?

Answer: The answer is in the last phrase of verse 18, "the simple" or unsuspecting. Notice:

Prov 14:15

15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

Prov 22:3

3 A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

Question 12: What can the church member do so as to not be "simple" or unsuspecting?

Answer: Immerse yourself into the Word of God. Stay close to Christ. Pray without ceasing. Invoke the power of

the Holy Spirit within you. Listen to Mr. Armstrong's sermon, "Is Christ Divided" posted in sermons section of the Church web site. [click here](#)

Eph 4:14

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

1 John 4:1

4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.