

What Makes A Great Church, Part 7 - Romans 16:19 – December 1st, 2013

- Today's teaching will be part seven of a series titled, "What Makes A Great Church."
- One reason we're only taking one verse again is, starting with verse 17 each verse deals with subject matter crucial to the life of a church.
- More specifically, the Apostle Paul goes from greeting friends, to warning about foes posing a threat to the health and the life of a church.
- A warning so important, Paul, by the Holy Spirit, would deem it necessary to devote his parting words to address this in closing this epistle.
- Keep in mind, Paul is passionately penning these words himself, as we'll see in verse 22, when he seems to give the pen back to Tertius.
- I point that out because these packed and pointed verses had risen to the level of Paul needing to validate and authenticate them in writing.
- Another reason we're only taking one verse is because the previous verse builds a poignant platform, if you will, for the subsequent verse.
- By that I mean; there's a progression of sorts, such that one warning builds upon, and is contingent upon, the other warnings that follow.
- It's for this reason that I want to start with verse 17, this because, it's the nexus, or linchpin, if you prefer, for the next verses and warnings.
- Here's how I get there, verse 17 speaks to how the truth teachers can wolf proof a church by virtue of the firm foundation of sound doctrine.
- It's evidenced by verse 18, which speaks to grounded Christians rightly dividing the Word who aren't naïve concerning divisive counterfeits.
- It's these hearers and doers of God's Word of truth who've had their immunization, against the deadly disease of divisions and dissensions.
- In other words when the word is preached and truth is taught in a church you'll find in that great church Christians grounded in God's Word.
- Let me hasten to say, that while there's no such thing as a perfect church, there is in fact, such a thing as a faultless, or blameless church.
- By way of example there's two of the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3 Smyrna & Philadelphia for whom there's no rebuke from the Lord.
- The common denominator between these two churches is they held strong and kept God's Word in spite of evil opposition and persecution.
- I suppose you could say, the Smyrna church, and the Philadelphia church, were both a great church, because they were grounded in truth.
- Because the truth was taught in that church, the Christians were not naïve about the Word, and as such, they were naïve about the world.

12. Wise Christians (Verse 19)

(19) Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

- v19 Paul says he's full of joy, and everyone has heard of their obedience but he wants them to be wise about the good and naïve about evil.
- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is woven into the fabric the 'what' of the Word is the how of the Holy Spirit.
- Let me explain, the 'what' is being innocent concerning evil, and the how is being wise concerning God's Word, and, there's even the why.
- The why is because I'll be obedient to God's Word, and when I'm obedient to God's Word vis-à-vis God's wisdom I'm innocent towards evil.
- Better said, the teaching of truth makes for grounded Christians who grow in the wisdom of God's Word thus innocent about the evil world.
- Conversely, not teaching truth makes for naïve Christians who won't be wise, which leads to the world changing the church not visa versa.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a bit as I tackle the touchy topic of the church being culturally relevant so as to be attractive to the world.
- I submit that sadly, the church today has bought into the Devil's lie that the church has to become like the world, in order to win the world.
- The fact of the matter is, nothing could be further from the truth. It's the opposite that's true, in that the world is not looking for more world.
- Personally, when I came to Christ, and first stepped foot in a church, I wasn't looking for or attracted to the worldliness that I'd come out of.
- I'd had my fill of the world, and desperately needed for the church to be a church. Had the church been like the world, then why even go?
- I think of Moses, whose life could be divided into three forty-year segments. The first forty-years he had become wise in the ways of Egypt.
- The second forty-years God had to get him out of Egypt and get Egypt out of him in order to do what he did in the last forty-years of his life.
- Namely, to get the children of Israel out of Egypt, and to get Egypt out of the children of Israel. What's interesting about this is the typology.
- Egypt is a type of the world, and the number forty is a type of God's judgment. Suffice it to say, this speaks to God's judgment of the world.
- Moreover, it speaks to God's deliverance from slavery to the sin of the world, which is why born again believers are in, but not of the world.
- This is where today's text comes into play, such that a church filled with the carnality of the world, won't be innocent of the evil in the world.
- However, if a church is filled with the Holy Spirit of God and the Holy Word of God then there's no room to be filled with the evil in the world.
- By way of illustration, if I fill up with an unhealthy Big Mac before dinner, I am not going to have any room left for the healthy food at dinner.
- So too is this true when it comes to the word of God, and the wisdom from God; I hunger for it proportionate to my capacity to be filled by it.
- I like how one commentator put it, "Evil is a snare. It will erode your soul, zap your spiritual energy, and diminish your hunger for the Word."
- It's been said, sin will keep you from the Bible, and the Bible will keep you from sin. Listen to what David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel said.

Psalms 119:9-11 NKJV How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. (10) With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! (11) Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

- By the way, Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. The longest chapter in God's Word is about God's Word.
- This is where I'd like to close today's sermon, simply put, when I'm wise about and obedient to God's Word, I'll be innocent concerning evil.
- And, my innocence concerning earthly evil will be proportionate to my being filled with heavenly wisdom. Consider James in this context.

James 3:13-18 NIV Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (14) But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. (15) Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. (16) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (17) But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (18) Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.