

DEDICATED
ROMANS 16:17-27

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE MADE UP OF MATURE BELIEVERS WHO ARE DEDICATED TO THE TRUTH, DEDICATED TO ONE ANOTHER, AND DEDICATED TO GOD.

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This morning we are finishing up one of the most difficult and theologically packed books in the Bible. I hope you have enjoyed studying through it as much as I have enjoyed preaching through it. Starting next week, I will be preaching a 5-week series about what our purpose is in life, why do we exist as individuals, and why do we exist as a church? Then starting October 19th, I'll start preaching through the book of Proverbs.

But let's get back to this morning's text. Paul has written this huge letter to the church in Rome, and now as he concludes, he almost sounds like a parent giving final instructions to their children as they leave the house. Those of us who are parents know the anxiety we feel every time our children leave the house. We say things like, "Don't forget to ... make sure you ... did you ..." it's as if we want to make sure that we cover every base before they leave. And those of you who are our children can sense our anxiety. Thank you for not holding that against us.

Paul knows the letter is coming to an end, so he wants to blurt out all he thinks he may have missed. I think we could sum up what he is saying in one word, dedicated. If you think about it, dedication has a lot to do with every day life. We as husbands are dedicated to our wives. Parents are dedicated to their children. We as believers are called to be dedicated to God. We even dedicate babies to God.

I have a pastor friend who is very clever and artistic. He can always make his preaching outlines rhyme. You know each point matches the next. It might sound something like, "Be justified! Be sanctified! Be glorified!" Sometimes I'm jealous of

these guys with such poetic talent. However, sometimes my friend is too clever for his own good. He refers to little girls as rosebuds; I don't know where he came up with that, nevertheless, little girls are rosebuds to him. During a baby dedication service, it is customary for the pastor to hold the baby up towards God and dedicate her to the Lord.

During one such service, my friend held up the baby girl, but forgot her name. And so he said, "Lord ... this bud's for you."

As I read this final section of the Book of Romans, I feel as if Paul is frantically trying to remind me of everything he has said, and is afraid that he may have left something out.

Now I'm not as clever as my friend, but I think that we could say that Paul's concluding remarks can be summarized by reminding us that: **HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE MADE UP OF MATURE BELIEVERS WHO ARE DEDICATED TO THE TRUTH, DEDICATED TO ONE ANOTHER, AND DEDICATED TO GOD.** We could say that dedication to the right things makes for healthy individuals and healthy individuals are what it takes to make healthy churches. There are many very dedicated individuals, but too many times, we find ourselves dedicated to the wrong things. People are dedicated to money, power, comfort, pleasure, and to control. However, authentic Christians are dedicated to those things that God defines as valuable.

I. DEDICATED TO THE TRUTH (Vs. 17-20)
MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO TEACHING THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE.

Which brings us to Paul's first point: In verses 17-20, Paul urges us to dedicate ourselves to the truth: **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO TEACHING**

THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE. One of the most discouraging things to me concerning the Western church is our lack of desire to read, study, meditate, and memorize the Bible. I've said this before, but it's worth repeating. Most Christians, even those who have been Christians for a long time, have never read through the entire Bible. Like our guest speaker a couple of weeks ago said, "If you haven't read and studied through the whole Bible, then you are missing much of God's perspective on life. Now I know that many of you have taken this seriously and have started to study the Bible. However, the fact that so many can be deceived by television preachers never ceases to amaze me.

I know a lot of good people, and I have good friends who are continually impressed by these miracle workers. A couple of years ago, it was reported that people were finding the fillings in their teeth changed to gold so that many people flocked to the Toronto Airport Church. I had friends who asked me to go with them. I remember sitting on my deck talking with Henry about this church. I said something like, "I can't figure out why my friends insist on going there. I don't need gold fillings in my teeth. I need to be a more loving husband, a more patient son, and a more gracious and merciful pastor. I need the fruit of the Spirit to manifest itself in my life ... not gold dust in my mouth."

Yet night after night, week after week, people flock to these miracle workers and televangelists, looking for something miraculous to happen. Let me humbly suggest something: If you are a husband, reading your Bible, placing yourself in God's hands to mold you into a much better husband and father, is much more valuable than chasing after miracles. The same goes for women. For unmarried people, studying about purity

in the Bible and praying that God make you pure is much more important than chasing the latest in Christian fads.

A. FALSE TEACHERS (Vs. 17-18)

Paul warned the church in Rome to expect false teachers in verses 17-18; Paul uses strong language here where he says, “I urge you, I beg you, I implore you, I stand beside you brothers and sisters.” He wants them to take this warning seriously because even though these false teachers have not yet arrived, sooner or later they will be a threat to the church in Rome. Today, with television, air travel, email, and the web, immature Christians become easy marks for false or sensational teachers. The only way not to be confused is to know, “to really know” our Bibles.

Paul goes on to give us some characteristics of false teachers. First, they are divisive. It’s interesting to me that most church fights have little to do with important issues, however, causing divisions in church is an offense that Paul says in several places is reason for excommunication. That’s why gossip is so dangerous. It causes divisions. That’s why sometimes in churches, wounded people or outcasts get together and form groups. The problem is that they separate themselves from the church body and wear this as a badge of honor. If you listen to a lot of these famous televangelists or miracle workers, they will almost always have some doctrine that deviates from historical church doctrine. They will cause divisions among people in their local churches.

Secondly, they will breed confusion. Paul says that they will put obstacles in your way. Usually, these false teachers will take an obscure passage of Scripture and put all sorts of meaning into it. People become confused about salvation or they become confused as to their relationship with God. This is especially true of people who make

healing their primary ministry. Let me give you an example: Some modern day faith healers say that we should not be sick if we are Christians. They say that if we are sick, it is because of sin in our lives or because we don't have enough faith to make us well. That is just false. If we knew our Bibles and had confidence in God, we would know that that is just plain false. Yet, people get confused by these messages and it causes them to be confused about God's love for them.

Paul says that we can identify false teachers because their teaching is contrary to Biblical teaching; they are fads. Many well-meaning Christians give me stuff to read about "spirituality." They get excited about the latest book or television fad on spirituality. That really discourages me because they don't have the biblical knowledge or discernment to know it is false. Listen, just because you hear the word spirituality doesn't mean it's Christian. Even those who claim to be Christian are easily identifiable. They will usually take one aspect of the Christian life and then overemphasize it to the point of distortion. Let's get back to healing for a moment. The Bible clearly teaches anointing and healing, however, to overemphasize it and distort it makes that person a false teacher. For example, if she says that if you don't get well then you are harboring sin or you have a lack of faith, then she is a false teacher. Be careful of people who take one aspect of Christianity, and then overemphasize it to the point of distortion.

Now, in verse 18, Paul gives us some very visible characteristics of these false teachers. They are self-centered and they are more interested in serving themselves than they are in serving God. Paul says, "They are certainly not serving God, they are serving their own flesh." Some of these people are becoming obscenely and embarrassingly rich.

I think we can identify these people easily enough although you would be surprised to see how many people come to the defense of these ministers.

But for me, I think that I have to be careful in the sense of fulfilling my own needs and desires in the ministry. Many of us go into the ministry to solve our own problems. If you look at the health care professions, the counseling professions, the teaching professions, and the ministry professions, you will often find a lot of people who are trying to solve their own problems.

In addition, many pastors enter the ministry with an agenda; they may want to effect political or social change so they enter the ministry. Some people have a need for control so they enter the ministry. Although most of the above are noble causes, they are not legitimate reasons to be in ministry.

For me, I know that I like people, and I like people to like me. If that becomes the motive for what I teach or how I minister, then I am in real danger of being a false teacher. In order to avoid this, I have several people around me who are honest enough to tell me when I'm on track or off track and believe me; they don't have the gift of mercy. They tell me straight out. I really appreciate that because I don't ever want to be a false teacher or discredit the Name of Jesus in any way. In fact, I often pray that if I am going to do something stupid that will bring disgrace to Jesus, that Jesus just go ahead and take my life ahead of time.

These false teachers are smooth. They're persuasive. They are clever, slick, and they appear to have it all together. Look at the last phrase in verse 18: They deceive naïve people. For the most part, mature believers can recognize false teachers and false

doctrine quickly. However, those of us who neglect reading and studying our Bibles will easily be fooled and confused.

B. FRESH BELIEVERS (V. 19)

In verse 19 Paul contrasts the false teachers with fresh believers. Paul is reminding them that they are vulnerable because at this point many of them are new to the faith and naïve about Christian doctrine. They have had little formal training although we know from last time that there are many able teachers and leaders there. Many had given their lives to Jesus in faith and obedience. But they need to take responsibility to grow and mature.

Look what Paul says in the middle of verse 19: He says that he is filled with joy to hear of their decisions to follow Christ ... BUT ... he wants them to be wise about what is good. Through dedicating themselves to the Old Testament and the Apostles' teachings, he wants them to become proficient at recognizing and doing good. He doesn't want them to practice evil or to be sucked into false teaching.

C. FAITHFUL GOD (V. 20)

And then in verse 20 Paul reminds them we worship a faithful God who always keeps His promises. Way back in the beginning of the Bible, just about 2 pages in, God promised that a savior would come and crush Satan. At the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God dealt a fatal blow to Satan. It is a continual crushing until the second-coming of Jesus when the job is completed.

Paul ends this section with a benediction where he says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." God gives us grace to grow. We grow through studying His Word, the Bible. He gives us grace to stand strong, even through persecution, setbacks, illness,

and death. He promised to never leave us or forsake us. He promised us success. We will continue to be shaped and molded in this life, and spend eternity with Him in the next.

If we want to be successful as individuals and as a church, we must remember that: **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO TEACHING THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE.** Let me put in a plug here; Beth Hedges has graciously agreed to give up her valuable time to spend a day here teaching people how to read and study the Bible. The seminar will be on Saturday, September 13th. Please see her, Setsuko, or Bucky for details. I urge all of you to attend. Sometimes we don't study the Bible because we don't know how. This is an excellent seminar that will make it simple. Please attend.

II DEDICATED TO ONE ANOTHER (Vs. 21-24)
MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF EACH MEMBER.

The next point is one of great importance to Paul. You can see it in almost all of his letters. In verses 21-24, Paul reminds us that we are to be dedicated to one another. In Paul's mind: **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF EACH MEMBER.** We have said that many times in our church. Each of us has been given a spiritual gift; we have been given talents, abilities, and resources. A well functioning church recognizes the fact that each person is vital to the healthy operation of the church. No one person has all the spiritual gifts. No one person has all the talents, resources, and abilities to make the church go. God made it so that we need one another's gifts to have the church function in a healthy manner. You have gifts, talents, abilities, and resources that I need to help me complete my tasks as a

Christian. I have gifts, talents, abilities and resources that you need to function as a healthy Christian.

A. CO-WORKERS (V. 21)

In verse 21 we see that we all need co-workers to successfully complete ministry. Paul never thought he could do it alone. He found Timothy, disciplined him, and trained him. He refers to Timothy not as a helper or student; he refers to Timothy as a fellow worker. Let me remind all of us who are leaders. Ministry is not about being in charge or being in control, ministry is about developing co-workers. Paul hooked up with Timothy on his second missionary journey. Timothy accompanied Paul and his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys. He stayed with Paul during his jail time and became the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Timothy co-authored 6 of Paul's letters in the New Testament. Even though Timothy was Paul's son in the faith, Paul treated him as a co-worker. We need to keep that in mind as we lead. We are here to develop co-workers, not control ministry.

B. HELPERS (V. 22)

All the help we can get in church is important. In verse 22, Paul reminds us that we all need helpers. We know nothing about Tertius except that he is Paul's amanuensis. It seems that Paul had trouble with his eyes because he dictated this letter to this secretary. What's interesting is that Paul didn't treat him or view him as a simple secretary or amanuensis; Tertius felt he had the freedom to greet the church in Rome.

This is a concept that I have been trying to sell to churches for the past 20 years. Everything we do in church is a ministry. I think sometimes that is evident in ministries such as preaching or teaching, however, let's take the cleaning crew. To come here week

after week, year after year, is a demonstration of great dedication, however, if this is where it ends, then it is shortchanging who they are. Each one on the cleaning crew is a minister. Each one is a pastoral co-worker. I am very appreciative of each of you who clean the building; you keep our church looking beautiful. However, if you view yourself any less than a co-pastor with me, then you have not understood the definition of what it means to be Christian. Cleaning is something you do, ministering is who you are. If even one person in our congregation fails to realize that we are all ministers, then we are not operating at full efficiency.

C. HOSTS (V. 23)

And verse 23 reminds us that we always need hosts. Not everybody has the gift of hospitality, I know many of you do and I am grateful. Gaius certainly has the gift of hospitality; he is hosting Paul and it seems that the local church operates out of his house. If you have the gift of hospitality, I can't begin to tell you how valuable you are to the church. For example, we are starting to birth small group ministry here. Maybe you don't have the gift of teaching or pastor or evangelizing. Maybe you are not a gifted leader or talented counselor. However, if you have the gift of hospitality, then you could serve by hosting a small group at your house. Gracious hosts are always important, people will always feel comfortable and welcome in your home.

Look, we all have special gifts, talents, abilities, and resources. God spread them out so that we would have to work together: **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF EACH OTHER.**

III. DEDICATED TO GOD (Vs. 25-27)

MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO WORSHIPPING THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD.

As we can see, we are to dedicate ourselves to truth and to one another. However, most importantly, we are to be dedicated to God in verses 25-27: **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO WORSHIPPING THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD.** There are so many ideas out there concerning God, spirituality, and religion. All these ideas and concepts are not true. There is only One True and Living God He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has revealed Himself to us through the Bible.

Now before I go on, you will notice that I have omitted verse 24; that is because that verse is not found in the best manuscripts. The verse reads, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Now there is nothing wrong with the doctrine or theology, the verse is simply not found in our best manuscripts and the sentiment is found in other verses in this section and throughout the book of Romans.

A. HE IS ABLE (V. 25)

In verse 25 Paul says that God is able. I think that we often don't get involved in ministries or we don't step out in faith because we are always focused on our own talents and abilities. However, it is God who establishes us and causes us to stand. When I prepare and preach a sermon, it has nothing to do with my hard work, my diligence, or my intelligence. It is God's spiritual gifts at work in me. If we start to depend on our own talents and energy, then we will no doubt burn out and take others down with us. We must remember that God is the One who causes us to stand, to persevere, and to succeed. This is what the Gospel message is all about. I cannot do one thing that will make me right with God. I cannot do enough good to earn His love. There is nothing I

can do to make Him love me any more. Without Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and without the Love of God ... **I CAN DO NOTHING!**

Many of my friends and colleagues wonder how our church can operate so smoothly given our diversity; I tell them it's no secret. It has absolutely nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with God fulfilling His promises. Everything we have done to encourage growth has failed, yet, we continue to grow. Look at verse 25: The mystery that was revealed in Jesus is that God intends for all people to come to know Him and to be in a direct relationship with Him. No longer would a right relationship with God be dependent on a particular religion or a particular set of rules. Reconciliation between God and us takes place directly through faith in Jesus.

B. HE IS PERSONAL (V. 26)

That brings us to the nature of God in verse 26, He is personal. It is God's desire to see every person saved. His desire is that people from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We need to constantly remind ourselves that even though Jesus is God, He willingly set aside all His Godly privileges to take on human flesh, suffer and die so that we could be in a right relationship with God. When we confess Him as Lord, when we surrender our lives to Him in faith, He takes up residence in our lives through the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer, then God personally lives in you. We can talk to Him at any time and He is with us every moment. That is pretty personal.

C. HE IS WISE (V. 27)

And finally, the God we worship is wise. The thing that makes Christianity so true to me is the plan of salvation that God worked out. There is no human being that

could ever devise such a plan. How could a human being ever come up with the idea of God punishing Himself on my behalf so that I could be in a right relationship with Him? This plan is so amazing that it leaves no room for human pride. All the glory must go directly to God forever and ever. Amen. **MATURE CHURCHES ARE DEDICATED TO WORSHIPPING THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD.**

Paul was dedicated to his calling. He loved God. He loved his own people, the Jews. He loved Gentiles who never had the opportunity to hear about God. That's what Paul wants to tell us as he closes this letter to the church in Rome. He wants us to know this: **HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE MADE UP OF MATURE BELIEVERS WHO ARE DEDICATED TO THE TRUTH, DEDICATED TO ONE ANOTHER, AND DEDICATED TO GOD.** Too many Christians are sitting on the sidelines in the modern day church. Christianity is meant to be lived. We have got to get out there and live our lives for Christ. We must be risk takers.

Listen to the words of Winston Churchill.

Persistence

It is not the critic who counts nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least, fails while darning greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. Winston Churchill