

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

PAUL'S FINAL INSTRUCTION

Romans 16:17-27

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The title of my sermon today is “Paul’s Final Instruction” and I’ll be reading from Romans 16:17-27.

**INTRODUCTION:** We’ve come a long way this year. Some of you have not missed one message from Romans and others have been here when you could be.

Chris Juby is a man who summarized each chapter of the Bible, some 1189 chapters. He posted his summaries on Twitter a few years ago, one chapter per day. Each summary is no more than 144 letters.

Rom1: Paul, to the saints in Rome. I am eager to preach the gospel to you. The unrighteous have no excuse. God gave them up to their lusts.

Rom2: In judging, you condemn yourself. The doers of the law will be justified. Do you boast in the law but break it? A Jew is one inwardly.

Rom3: The Jews were given the oracles of God. But no one is justified by the law. All have sinned and are justified through faith in Jesus.

Rom4: Abraham was counted righteous by faith before he was circumcised. He is the father of all who believe. The promise depends on faith.

Rom5: Therefore we rejoice in hope. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. As sin came through one man, so grace abounds through Christ.

Rom6: We were baptized into Christ's death. So consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Offer yourselves to God for righteousness.

Rom7: You have died to the law. Is the law sin? No, sin produced death in me. I do not do what I want to do. My flesh serves the law of sin.

Rom8: The law of the Spirit has set you free. We are children of God and co-heirs with Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Rom9: I grieve for my kinsmen. But not all Israel are Israel. God has mercy on whom he wills. Israel did not pursue righteousness by faith.

Rom10: Everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. How will they hear if no one preaches? Moses says of Israel, "I will make you jealous."

Rom11: Even now there is a remnant of Israel. You Gentiles have been grafted into the tree. All Israel will be saved. Glory to God forever!

Rom12: Present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God. We are one body in Christ. Love one another as brothers. Overcome evil with good.

Rom13: Submit to authorities. Pay taxes to those due taxes. Owe nothing except love, which fulfills the law. Clothe yourselves with Christ.

Rom14: Accept those who are weak in faith. Everything is clean but it is wrong to cause anyone to stumble. Whatever is not of faith is sin.

Rom15: Each of us should build up our neighbors. Christ confirmed the promises given to the patriarchs. I hope to see you as I go to Spain.

Rom16: I commend to you Phoebe. Greet Prisca, Aquila, Andronicus, Junia and Rufus. Avoid those who cause divisions. Glory to God forever!

If you've learned something from Romans, would you mind writing it down and letting me know? I'd be glad to hear it. I've created 150 pages or more of my own notes during these months of preaching. And now we come to Paul's closing words. With all that he said in the book, what possibly more needs to be said?

## **PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE FELLOWSHIP**

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:17-18

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. <sup>18</sup> For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul closed out his lengthy letter with the topic of unity. When we look at the backgrounds of all the people mentioned in the book of Romans, you'll have to agree with me it was a miracle that all people could come together like they did. Most of you have heard me say several times that people who previously hated each other were now loving on each other. People who served other gods were now worshipping one God. People who would have never shared a meal together were now sharing a meal.

Was this unity because they worked for the same companies? No

Was this unity because some political situation brought them together? Not at all.

Was this unity because they did a DNA test and discovered they were all distant kin anyway? Far from it.

They were together because of one thing: the saving work of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. You see, when they repented of their sin, they realized they were no better than anyone else. When they repented of their sin, they realized their family heritage entitled them to nothing spiritually. When they repented of their sin and trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior they realized – listen to what I am about to say – I am about to give a descriptor that today's preachers don't like to say and believe is weak. Are you ready? When they repented of their sin and trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior, they realized they were nothing but sinners saved by grace.

Jesus is the great equalizer. He is the narrow gate. Everyone who wants to be saved must enter through the narrow gate. The narrow gate is Jesus. We may all find Jesus in different ways. He may reach out to us in different ways, but once we are confronted by Jesus, once he is in front of us, we must make the decision. Will we enter his narrow gate, trusting him only for forgiveness and salvation? Or will we turn away?

The people at the church in Rome had entered the narrow gate. They forsook their pasts, they disbelieved what they had once believed, and when they put on Christ, they let go of their prejudices and hate. People – listen to me – The New Testament is proof that haters can change. The Apostle Paul, the chief hater of Christians, wrote the books about giving up hate and putting on love.

Paul knew it was no accident all these people had come together in Rome. And he knew one thing could destroy it: people who cause divisions.

What did he say? Watch out. It's important that we be on guard, not as paranoid people but as people guarding the unity of the church.

Why did Paul say they will do? They will cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.

Let's do a quick word study:

**Urge** – The Greek word translated as the English word “urge” means exhort or beg. Paul was doing more than urging. Paul was insisting.

**Watch out** – The Greek word here means scrutinize.

**Divisions** – The Greek word Paul used here means to make people stand apart in pointless factions. To use our own idioms “making a mountain out of a molehill,” “splitting hairs,” or “making a big deal out of nothing.”

**Obstacles** – the Greek word is *skandalon* which means the device that causes entrapment, like a tripper causing a trap to close down on its victim. In this context, it means how one is caught in their own snares through personal bias or carnal thinking. That is very, very interesting.

So here's my translation of the original Greek: **I beg you, scrutinize those who cause divisions by making big deals out of nothing because of their own bias and carnal thinking.**

**APPLICATION:** As your pastor, I take unity very seriously. In the five years I've served here, I've had concerns about two situations that caused disunity. I sought sincere counsel from our deacons. In both cases, we prayed and acted as we felt best and both situations were resolved.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Churches used to use the term *unified budget*. It's easy for churches to fall victim to people giving and designating their money. One pastor told me he had a regular giver who designated his offering to the Red Cross and other charitable organizations. One day he handed his check back to the man and told him to send it to the Red Cross. Churches can't do ministry and be the clearing house for giving to charitable organizations at the same time. So we've used the term *unified budget* to accomplish several things: it defines that we are unified in our giving and how it is distributed.

Don't you agree with me that it is important for churches to be unified?

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:19 Let's read on:

*Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul did not want them to fail. He did not want them to be like other churches that he had to reprimand. He knew the seeds of success had been planted, but he was wise enough to know the seeds of failure were nearby as well.

In my mind's eye, I can see a messenger arriving with a long letter from the Apostle Paul. As the church gathers for a reading of the letter, they talk among themselves about what it must say, and they hope it will address some of their concerns. A person begins reading. The letter is long, so they take a break and talk about what they've learned so far. And as the letter progresses, they wonder how it will end. They know they've had differences of opinion. They know they've not always agreed.

And then there it is: Be unified. Watch out for those who cause problems.

**APPLICATION:** The unity or disunity of any church is what writes the history book for that church. And ours is no exception. If we are unified, we'll be strong and accomplish God's mission for us. If we are not, we will fail.

Yes, let us have firm convictions. Yes, let us disagree at times. Yes, let us settle our differences and move on together. If we reach an impasse, we have these options: yield, be yielded to, or move on. No body of Christ is healthy when there is discord.

And then Paul's final words -

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 16:20-27

*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*

*The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

<sup>21</sup> *Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews.*

<sup>22</sup> *I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.*

<sup>23</sup> *Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.*

*Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.*

<sup>25</sup> *Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith - <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

**CONCLUSION:** God used Paul as a catalyst to fulfill prophecy.

Do you know this Jesus the Apostle Paul wrote about? You can know him because he is more than just a historical figure. He is the living Savior. He was crucified on the cross for our sins, he was buried, and he arose from the dead three days later. As a risen Savior he appeared to many people and then he ascended into heaven. Today he is in heaven preparing a place for us, according to the scripture.

You can have eternal life, you can have hope in this life, if you only repent and believe.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
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