

A SERIES OF DEVOTIONS BASED ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME

WATCH OUT FOR THOSE WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS

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. 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.”

In the Apostle's Creed you confess that you believe in “the holy Christian Church . . .” The Small Catechism says that “the holy Christian church is to be found where ‘the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered.’” (Augsburg Confession VII 1) The Gospel and the sacraments are called the ‘marks of the church.’”

The Small Catechism says there is a visible church. “The visible church is the whole number of those who use the Word of God and profess the Christian faith.” It further states that the visible church is made up of both believers and unbelievers. The answer to question 178 continues, “There is only one church—all believers in Christ.

Jesus says He is the vine and we are the branches and if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit but apart from Him we can do nothing. (John 15:5) He further says, If we abide in His word, we are truly His disciples, we will know the truth and that truth will set us free from our sins and eternal death. (John 8:31-32) Revelation 1:3 says those who read and hear the word of God are blessed.

Since the church here on earth is the visible church composed of believers and unbelievers, St. Paul says, “take careful notice of those who cause divisions and upset people's faith contrary to the teaching which you have received” (Ro 16:17) Satan strives to divide the church into groups by causing quarrels and arguments sometimes over what God's word says and at other times over temporal (non-spiritual) matters.

False teachers/preachers “stir up” a congregation so members become angry at one another. Faithful teachers/preachers tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. St. Paul says in Galatians 1:8 “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached

to you, let him be accursed.” John exhorts, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Luke writes of the early Christians, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” God grant us His Holy Spirit to lead us to do this in 2024.

Prayer; Lord, keep us steadfast in your word. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has
done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow’r make known, For You are Lord of lords alone;
Defend Your holy Church that we May sing Your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life.
(LSB 655)