

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

ONE GOD-ONE SAVIOR-ONE WAY TO HEAVEN

Romans 16:19 “. . . I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.”

The context of verse 19 is verses 17 and 18. There Paul has warned the Roman Christians to be on the look out for false teachers and individuals who create divisions. Positively stated, he wanted them to remain faithful to the Gospel he had preached and taught them.

In verse 19 he concludes with an exhortation to the Roman Christians to be “wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil.” He wanted them to test what teachers taught that it was in conformity with the true Gospel Paul had proclaimed. Paul recognized that the message of false teachers can be compelling, enticing, seductive because it is enticing to the thoughts and desires of the Old Adam all people have.

As you know, there are many preachers of the Gospel who purport to present its message in truth and purity. Unfortunately, this is not always true. Paul's words to the Romans are therefore also words to you, “I want you to be wise to what is good. . .” This necessitates faithfully reading the Holy Scriptures and finding faithful teachers who teach God's word in its truth and purity. John gives you the most basic test, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.” (1 John 4:1-3) Verse 19 is like the second of two bookends that hold all the books together. The first was in Romans 12:2 “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

“Innocent about evil” is the second exhortation of St. Paul in this verse. Innocent is a translation of the Greek word ἀκερμιος. It means “unmixed, pure, without admixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple.” It has in mind purity such as “pure gold,” meaning the gold is gold with no foreign substances mixed in or unadulterated wine, that is not watered down or two or more wines mixed

together. St. Paul's point is, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Ephesians 4:4-7)

Prayer: Lord, protect me from false teachers and false religions. Guide me by Your Spirit through Your Word to faith in Jesus who alone is the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)

I know my faith is founded On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing, Unmoved I stand on His sure Word.
Our reason cannot fathom The truth of god profound;
Who trusts in human wisdom Relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient, It makes divinely sure;
And trusting in its wisdom, My faith shall rest secure.

Increase my faith, dear Savior, For Satan seeks by night and day
To rob me of this treasure And take my hope of bliss away.
But, Lord, with You beside me, I shall be undismayed;
And led by Your good Spirit, I shall be unafraid.
Abide with me, O Savior, A firmer faith bestow;
Then I shall bid defiance To ev'ry evil foe.

In faith, Lord, let me serve You; Though persecution, grief, and pain
Should seek to overwhelm me, Let me a steadfast trust retrain;
And then at my departure, Lord take me home to You,
Your riches to inherit As all You said holds true.
In life and death, Lord, keep me Until Your heav'n I gain,
Where I by Your great mercy The end of faith attain.
(LSB 587)