HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FALSE TEACHERS
Romans 16:17-20
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Take your Bible and turn to Romans 16.
2. The title of this sermon is how to protect yourself from false teachers.
3. The danger of false teachers is real. I have personally witnessed several close friends of mine get pulled away from Christ by false teaching.
4. When I was in college I had a couple of friends, a young married couple, who were heavily involved in the Baptist Collegiate Ministry with me. They were on the leadership team. They were both raised in good Christian homes and in Christian churches. But they had a friend who was caught up in the cult of Oneness Pentecostalism. Oneness Pentecostalism is represented by United Pentecostal Church (UPC), and by churches that call themselves Apostolic. They are called "Oneness" because they deny the Trinity. You must be baptized in the name of Jesus only, not the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. You must be baptized and speak in tongues to be saved. You must also adhere to a host of rules and regulations – the women can't cut their hair, or wear makeup, or wear pants. The men have to wear long-sleeve shirts and pants. Anyway, in college my two friends got pulled in to this, and they ended up abandoning Orthodox Christianity.
5. I've heard countless stories of young people who have grown up in a Christian home, going to church regularly, but when they go to college they abandon the faith. I'm not just talking about the ones who stop going to church due to a lack of commitment. I'm talking about the ones who get sucked in to false teaching – atheism, agnosticism, Darwinism, Marxism, wokeism, climate alarmism, etc.
6. All that is to say that the threat of false teaching and false teachers is very real. And if you don't learn how to protect yourself and loved ones, false teaching can divide the church and destroy your faith.
7. So how can you protect yourself from false teaching? We will find some answers today in our text.

II. TEXT

1. **Romans 16:17-18** 17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching

that you learned. Avoid them, 18 because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites. They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words.

2. This passage gives us five defenses against false teaching.

III. 5 WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FALSE TEACHING

1. Put your guard up.

i. **Romans 16:17** Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned.

ii. Let's start with the phrase "I urge you." The Greek word is *parakaleo*. Sometimes it is translated exhort. It means to strongly advise or persuade or encourage someone to do something. Paul often used it in his letter.

1. Rm 12:1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.
2. 1 Cor 1:10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.
3. Eph 4:1-3 Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received.

iii. The word "urge" is a word of passion. Paul isn't just commanding his readers to do something. It is urging, exhorting, imploring, pleading.

iv. Here, Paul is urging his readers to watch out for false teachers. In other words; this is important; this is urgent; this is serious; this matters. Protecting yourself from false teachers is a really important issue.

v. The next phrase is "brothers and sisters." Paul also often used this phrase in his letters (see Rom 12:1). It's a term of endearment; of affection. With the phrase "I urge you" Paul is saying this is very important. With the words "brothers and sisters" Paul is expressing his loving concern for his readers. Paul is saying, "Listen, I love you; I really care about you; and I want what's best for you; and that's why I'm so insistent on this point. Please

protect yourself from false teachers for you own good." This whole matter of protecting yourself from false teachers is not just about protecting the church from division; it's not just about protecting the glory and reputation of God. It's what's best for you. It's for your own good. False teaching will mess you up. Please! Protect yourself!

vi. Next, notice the phrase "watch out." Romans 16:17 says, "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned."

vii. This is repeated elsewhere times in scripture:
    1. Mt 7:15 Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.
    2. In Acts 20:31 Paul told the Ephesian elders to "be on guard for yourself and for all the flock" against false teachers. Two verses later, in Acts 20:31, he said, "Be on the alert."

viii. What does Paul mean by "watch out"? He means put your guard up. If you were about to enter a boxing match, your coach would say, "Put your hands up." That's what Paul is saying. Watch out! Danger is lurking. False teachers are out there; in fact, they're often in here (the church); and they're dangerous, and they are coming for you, and your church, and your children, and your spouse.

ix. Go back to our text.

x. **Romans 16:17-18** 17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, 18 because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites. They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words.

xi. Notice who false teachers deceive – the unsuspecting. It's the person who is not aware that there are false teachers out there, and that they are very dangerous, very persuasive, very seductive. When Paul says, "Watch out," he is saying don't be unsuspecting. Keep your guard up.

xii. The word "unsuspecting" brings to my mind Christian parents who seem to be completely unaware that there are false teachers who are trying to capture their children. When I see the things they

give their children, the things they allow their children to do, the places they allow their children to go, I can only assume they are completely "unsuspecting." They have no idea that they are in a fight, and the threat is real, and someone is coming after their children.

xiii. Let me ask you. Is your guard up? Do you know how to keep your guard up? Do you why false teachers are so dangerous? Are you aware that every kind of false teaching you can imagine is being presented on YouTube and TikTok 24/7 by people who are very articulate and persuasive? Do you realize that Christians get sucked in to false teaching all the time?

xiv. So, how can you keep your guard up. That brings us to number two.

2. Keep your distance.

i. **Romans 16:17** 17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them.

ii. Notice the phrase "avoid them."
   1. NLT: stay away.
   2. NIV: keep away.

iii. This is not the only time the Bible tells Christians to keep away from certain people:
   1. Those who claim to be Christian but who live in obvious disobedience to God's word.
      a. 1 Cor 5:11 "But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person."
   2. Christians who are too lazy to provide for themselves.
      a. 2 Thess 3:6 Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us.

iv. What does it mean to avoid false teachers? The main idea is don't give them a hearing. Don't sit there and let them flood your mind

with their false ideas. One commentator was saying that Paul was telling his readers to not even engage them in debate.

v. I heard a story about the famous preacher Adrian Rogers who had Jehovah's Witnesses knock on his door. So he opened his door and invited them in and gave them some water and sat down to talk to them. He said, "I'll give you 15 minutes to tell me what a person has to do to go to heaven if you will give me the same amount of time. Act like we're in a plan that's going to crash in fifteen minutes. What do I need to do to go to heaven?" They agreed and started, but they fumbled and stumbled and didn't know where to begin. Finally, it was Adran's turn, and he didn't need fifteen minutes. That's a great story, but I'm not sure how that fits with Paul's words here to "avoid" false teachers. And what about the words of John?

vi. 2 Jn 10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not greet him; 11 for the one who greets him shares in his evil works.

vii. In other words, you are weaker than you realize. You are impressionable. Don't assume that you are so strong that you can sit there and listen to all of the arguments of a false teacher and not be influenced. Stay away! When you are listening to someone, as soon as you discover that they are a false teacher, turn it off, walk away, end the conversation.

viii. Think about what this means for you as a parent. As I said, on YouTube and TikTok you can find every imaginable false teaching being promoted 24/7 by very persuasive and articulate people. They are coming for your children. What are you doing to protect them? False philosophies and ideologies are being fed to your children through books, music, social media, movies, TV shows, school teachers, curriculum, classmates, coaches, team mates, etc. What are you doing to protect them from false teachers? Paul says to help your children avoid them. Keep your children away from them.

ix. Let me tell you what Lydia and I do with our kids.
    1. First, we don't give our kids a smart phone until they turn 18 and get a job. That keeps them away from the false teachers on the internet and social media.

2. Second, my kids only watch TV on the weekends, and then only in the evenings, and then they are only allowed to watch certain things. That keeps them away from the false teachings in TV shows and movies.
3. Third, our kids are home schooled. That protects them from false teaching that they might be exposed to at school through teachers and class mates.

x. You might say that's extreme. Here's my response. It only seems extreme because it is different. It's not normal. But that's okay. God hasn't commanded me to be normal, but to be like Christ. He hasn't commanded me to raise normal kids, but to raise Christlike kids. He hasn't commanded me to raise kids who follow the crowd, but kids who follow Christ.

3. Understand the danger.

i. Why are false teachers so dangerous?
ii. **Romans 16:17** Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them.
iii. This verse mentions two dangers of false teachers:
    1. They create divisions.
    2. They create obstacles.
iv. First, they divide the church. When someone introduces a false teaching in the church, there is conflict, and then people leave the church. Sometimes it is only the false teacher, but sometimes the several people leave with the false teacher. So false teaching can be very dangerous in the church.
v. I have heard of numerous churches that were split by Calvinism. I'm not saying that Calvinism is a false teaching (I don't call it that, even though I'm not a Calvinist), but the way it often happens is that a church that was not Calvinist hires a Calvinist (a.k.a. Reformed) pastor without knowing it. The pastor intentionally didn't tell the church about his staunch Calvinism. And then after he is hired he begins preaching that the church will now be a Calvinist church and anyone who doesn't accept it is in error. This is such a common phenomenon that it has a name – "stealth Calvinism." Half the church ends up following the pastor, and the other half disagrees, and the church ends up splitting.

vi. I have heard of a number of churches splitting over speaking in tongues. In a non-charismatic church, someone in the church will start teaching that everyone should speak tongues and you are not as spiritual if you don't speak in tongues, and this can split the church.
vii. False teachers are dangerous because they divide the church, and the mission of the church is too important for us to be divided.
viii. But false teachers also create obstacles. In other words, they make it harder for you to follow Christ. They damage your relationship with God.
ix. Watchman Fellowship is a cult watchdog ministry, and they teach that cults do four things: add, subtract, multiply, and divide.
    1. Add: They add an extra source of authority. This can be a teacher, or another holy book like the Book of Mormon, or the Quran.
    2. Subtract: They subtract from the person and work of Christ. They often say that Christ is not God, or that He is not coequal with the Father.
    3. Multiply: They multiply the requirements of salvation. You have to speak in tongues, or follow certain rules.
    4. Divide: They will divide your church and your allegiance to Christ.
x. In the end, false teachers distort the truth about God and Christ and the Bible, and so they pull you away from God, from the people of God, and from church.

4. Learn how to spot them.

i. One of the best ways to protect yourself from false teachers is to learn what to look for. This text gives us a fail-proof sign of a false teacher.
ii. **Romans 16:17-18** 17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, 18 because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites.
iii. They contradict sound doctrine.
    1. Notice the phrase "contrary to the teaching you learned." The church in Rome had already been taught sound doctrine by Paul and others. So, Paul was saying that the

way to spot a false teacher is that they teach things that contradict the sound doctrine that you have learned. False teachers contradict sound doctrine.

2. How do you know if someone contradicts sound doctrine? There are **three tests**.
3. First, the Bible.
    a. The Bible is our ultimate and final authority for sound doctrine. If someone contradicts the Bible, then you can be 100% confident that they are wrong. For example, if someone teaches that abortion is not sinful, they are a false teacher because the Bible clearly says that murder is wrong. Or if someone teaches that Jesus is not God, they are a false teacher because the Bible clearly says that Jesus is God. By the way, this test only works if you know your Bible. The more familiar you are with truth, the easier it is to spot error. When I encourage you to read your Bible, that's a way for me to protect you from false teaching, because the more you internalize the truth, the harder is for someone to deceive you.
    b. The weakness of this test is that false teachers usually use the Bible to support their teachings. For example, Oneness Pentecostals use the Bible to support all of their teachings. How do you know when someone is twisting scripture? That brings us to the second test.
4. Second, the Creeds.
    a. In the first few hundred years, before Christianity had split into denominations, the leaders of the church met in four councils and wrote down creeds to clarify and summarize sound doctrine. The most important of these is the Nicene Creed of 381, often referred to as "the Creed."
    b. The Nicene Creed is important because all three branches of Christianity affirm it – Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholics.
    c. What this means is that if someone contradicts these creeds, for example the Nicene Creed, then they are

not Christian. They have abandoned the Christian faith.

5. Third, Confessions.
    a. Besides the Ecumenical Creeds, every Christian denomination has a confessional statement – a summary of its beliefs that go into more detail than the creeds.
    b. The Southern Baptist confession is called the Baptist Faith in Message. You can read it on our church's website.
    c. The importance of the Baptist Faith and Message is that helps you determine whether or not someone's teaching is in line with our church.
    d. You don't have to agree with the Baptist Faith and Message to be a Christian, but you do have to agree with it to be a member of our church.
6. Roger Olson, in his book *Counterfeit Christianity*, talks about two different types of false teachers to look out for. One is more dangerous than the other, but they are both destructive and you need to know how to spot it.
    a. Ecumenical false teacher: This is someone who is teaching things that contradict the ecumenical creeds mentioned above. That means they are not a Christian.
    b. Denominational false teacher: This is someone who attends a church in a particular denomination and is knowingly teaching things that are contrary to that denomination's beliefs. For example, a denominational false teacher would be someone who attends a Southern Baptist Church, but they are knowingly teaching things that contradict the Baptist Faith and Message. That doesn't mean that they are not a Christian, or that they are leading people away from Christianity; it just means that they are intentionally leading people away from our faith community from within. That's sinister. That would be like me joining a Presbyterian Church even though I

disagree with their doctrine of infant baptism, and intentionally teaching people that infant baptism is wrong.

7. By the way, parents, two more things you can do to protect your kids from false teaching. Bible Drill, and Catechism. Both these will help them learn truth and grow their ability to discern error. I want to remind you that I have written a catechism, The Home Discipleship Catechism, and I have used it with my own kids since they were little. They all have it memorized. It covers basic and essential Christian doctrine. I review it with my kids every week.

5. Don't be fooled by externals.

i. How do so many people get deceived by false teachers? They focus on externals. What do I mean? There are certain external factors that make false teachers very persuasive:
   1. Good looks.
   2. Charismatic personality.
   3. Dynamic speaker (engaging; entertaining; great stories). Peter even said that false teachers will use made-up stories to deceive (2 Pt 2:3).
   4. Rich (worldly success).
   5. Large crowd/big audience. Even though it is illogical, people often assume that a large crowd authenticates a teacher. No, it just means he is good at attracting a crowd. Mohammad has 2 billion followers, but he's a false teacher. Joseph Smith has 17.8 million followers, but he's a false teacher. Charles Taze Russell has over 9 million followers, but he's a false teacher.
   6. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that some false teacher will even be able to drive out demons and perform miracles (Mt 7:21-23).

ii. All of these are external factors. None of them is proof that a teacher is biblical.

iii. But externals are powerful. They have a way of pulling people in. That's why Paul warned about it.

iv. **Romans 16:17-18** 17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to

the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, 18 because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites. They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words.

v. Notice how Paul said that false teachers operate. With smooth and flattering words. Those are external factors.
vi. How can you avoid getting fooled and swayed and impressed by externals? Focus on content and character. Do they teach sound doctrine? Do they display character Christlike?
vii. Mt 7:15-16 15 "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.
16 You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"
viii. In other words, a true Christian is not going to produce a life of blatant sin and disobedience, so if a teacher is producing that kind of fruit, then they are a false teacher.
ix. Don't be fooled by externals. Focus on content and character. Do they teach sound doctrine, and do they display Christlike character.

IV. THE FATE OF FALSE TEACHERS

1. Before we close, I want to give you the good news about false teachers.
2. **Romans 16:19-20** 19 The report of your obedience has reached everyone. Therefore I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise about what is good, and yet innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.
3. Paul makes four points in these verses.
    i. First, he affirms their obedience. He praises them because they have not yet succumbed to false teaching. In fact, he praises the Lord for their obedience.
    ii. Second, he exhorts them to continue to stand firm. "Be wise about what is good, and yet innocent about what is evil." Even though that had been obedient, Paul is warning them and writing to them because he wants them to continue on the right path.
    iii. Third, he prophesies the destruction of the false teachers. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Paul is not talking about the eschatological destruction of Satan when Christ

will throw Satan into the Lake of Fire as His second coming. We know that because he used the word "soon." Instead, by "Satan" Paul is talking about the false teachers who serve Satan. In 2 Cor 11:13-15 Paul refers to false teachers as servants of Satan. It reminds me of the time when Christ told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter wasn't Satan, but was serving Satan's interests when he was discouraging Christ from going to the cross. Paul was prophesying that very soon, the very false teachers who threatened the Roman church would be destroyed. All false teachers have a soon appointment with God's wrath.

iv. Fourth, Paul prays for them. "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." Grace in this context refers to God's help, God's enablement for the Christian life. Paul knows that the Roman church will need God's help to resist false teaching.

V. CONCLUSION

1. What's the most destructive false teaching today? It is any teaching denies the gospel. There's only one way to heaven – through faith in Jesus Christ. You must admit that you are a sinner and can't save yourself. You must believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again. You must call on Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.