

## **The God of Peace Will Soon Crush Satan Under Your Feet**

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### **Romans 16:17-20**

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. 18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. 19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Up till now in the book of Romans, Paul has never mentioned the devil (except indirectly in passing in Romans 8:38 where he said that neither "angels nor rulers" can separate us from the love of God in Christ). In view of how much he treats the truth of justification in chapters 3-5 and the Christian life in chapters 6-8, that silence about Satan should caution us against making too much of the devil in how we fight the fight of faith.

### **Satan's One Mention in Romans: He's Doomed**

Those who think of all struggles in terms of conflicts with the devil to be fought in face-to-face combat must wonder how Paul could write fifteen chapters about salvation and Christian living and not mention the Satan. Paul's silence till now does not mean that Satan is insignificant, or that he can be trifled with. But it does mean that we deal with Satan mainly indirectly rather than keeping him in our mind and going toe to toe (see in addition 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

But now, finally, near the end, Paul does mention Satan in Romans 16:20. And that's the main thing I want to talk about. When Paul finally mentions the devil, he has one thing to say about him. To use the words of Martin Luther, "His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure." Paul has one sentence to say about Satan in sixteen chapters. Verse 20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." That's all. He gets one mention. And the mention is: He's doomed. You will crush him under your feet.

### **Avoid Horny, Gluttonous Smooth-Talkers**

Now before we talk about that, let's see how that fits into the flow of Paul's thought. In verse 18, Paul said we should watch out for people who depart from the apostle's doctrine and try to take others with them. Avoid them, Paul says. Verse 19 gives the reasons for this vigilance: Because the false teachers are not always easy to spot with their smooth talk and their words of blessing. And so the danger is their private lives, it appears, turn out to be horny and gluttonous.

### **The Well-Known Obedience of the Romans**

That's what we saw last week. Now in verse 19, Paul commends the Romans for their obedience and mentions this as a reason why they need to be vigilant over error and why he is so happy about them. He says, "For your obedience is known to all." In other words, if false teachers get the upper hand among you, then all the more reproach will come to the name of Christ because your obedience is known everywhere. The greater your reputation for obedience, the more damage can be done if you get sucked into false teaching. So be vigilant "for your obedience is known to all." You have a great responsibility.

And, he says, I want you to know that your obedience brings me great joy. Verse 19: "Your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you." Paul had not founded this church. He had never been there. He was simply joyful over the reputation of a church that walked in obedience to Jesus. When you rejoice in churches, is it because they are big or have good music or because they are obedient to the radical demands of Jesus?

### **Experts in Good; Not Even Beginners in Evil**

Then Paul gives one more warning like he did in verse 17. Even though you are a basically obedient people and even though I have great joy in your obedience, I want to be sure to caution you one more time. Verse 19b: "I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." Paul said something like this to the Corinthians. He said, "Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature" (1 Corinthians 14:20). He got this way of talking from Jesus. Jesus had said, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Sheep in the midst of wolves. That makes an interesting link with the context in Romans. Here Paul is warning against wolves in sheep's clothing—people departing from the doctrine who talk like sheep and bless like sheep but "do not serve our Lord Christ." They are wolves ready to devour the naïve. When it comes to wisdom—the discerning of false teaching and destructive behaviors—don't be naïve. Be wise; be mature. But when it comes to evil—erroneous destructive doctrines and appetite – worship that goes with them—be innocent. Be like a child in the sense that you don't even make a beginning in evil. J. B. Phillips paraphrases Romans 16:19, "I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil."

So, Bethlehem, let's be that way: "Wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." You don't even need to be a beginner in evil. O how many pangs you young people will spare yourselves if you don't make any beginning in evil. There is evil enough in your own heart for Christ to deal with. You don't need to burden him with more.

### **Satan, the Head of Evil, Is Coming Off**

Finally, we come then to verse 20 and the point seems to be this: Do not be tricked or lured into any evil—false teaching or bondage to appetite—because the great head of evil, Satan, is going to be crushed. Be warned not to get involved with the works of Satan, because "lo, his doom is sure." And be encouraged to press on in your battle against all that is false and destructive because the Father of all lies and destruction will be destroyed.

I take verse 20a to be a broad, general, glorious promise about the triumph of the church over the Satan. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." I don't take it mainly as a reference to any current event in the Roman church because Paul hasn't described any crisis that appears to be coming to a head like that. The troubles he describes are of an ongoing kind. We will have to be vigilant for false teachers till the last day. I don't think it's a reference to a current event but to the last great events of history when Satan is finally crushed and put in the pit (Revelation 20:23) and in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). It's a warning not to be friends with evil because evil will lose. And it's an encouragement to stay vigilant against the false teaching because the fountain of all error will one day be destroyed.

### **The Larger Picture of Satan's Defeat**

So let's step back here and get the larger picture of what the New Testament says about the defeat of Satan. In Genesis 3:15, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent: "He shall bruise your head, and

you shall bruise his heel." Jesus comes to fulfill that promise. First John 3:8 says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." So we can sum up the work of Christ as destroying Satan in three stages.

1) Satan has been decisively defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ; 2) he is being defeated now by Christ through Christians who speak the word of God and put on the whole armor of God; and 3) he will finally be vanquished and thrown into the lake of fire never to deceive or torment the world again.

### **1. Satan Has Been Decisively Defeated in the Death and Resurrection of Christ.**

Paul puts it like this in Colossians 2:14-15, "[Christ cancelled] the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." By nailing our sins to the cross he took all the damning weapons out of the devil's hands. Now he can rage against us, but he cannot condemn. It is God who justifies, who is to condemn (Romans 8:33-34)? (See also Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Ephesians 1:22; John 12:21; 16:11.)

### **2. Satan Is Being Defeated Now by Christ Through Christians Who Believe and Speak the Word of God and Put on the Whole Armor of God.**

Ephesians 6:12-13, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm." (See also Revelation 12:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6). So we today embrace and apply the victory of Christ by faith in our battles against the devil—mainly by believing and wielding the word of God (cf. 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

### **3. Satan Will Finally Be Vanquished and Thrown into the Lake of Fire Never to Deceive or Torment the World Again.**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "[Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." The defeat was decisive in the cross and resurrection, but the final blow will be delivered in the future when Christ puts all things manifestly under his feet. There's the link with Romans 16:20—"under his feet." Only here it's under your feet: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." And the reason it's your feet is that we are in Christ and his triumphs will be our triumphs.

This is as certain to happen as the fact that Christ already came and died and rose again. That's why Ephesians 1:22 speaks of all things as already under Christ's feet. "God put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church." Romans 16:20 is a glorious promise to beleaguered saints in times and places where it seems as if evil has the upper hand and Satan is devouring the world. And it is a warning not to give up and change sides. It is an encouragement to keep on being vigilant against falsehood and idolatry and to "be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."

### **Grace for the Battle**

And in the meantime—till the final victory comes and Satan is vanquished—there will be grace for long battle. Verse 20b: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." It arrives every day in just the right amount for the battles we face. It is new every morning. Great is his faithfulness.

### **How Long, O Lord?**

Which leaves one last question. How long, O Lord? How long till the victory comes? "How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?" (Psalm 74 10).

And Paul answers, "Soon." Verse 20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." What does that mean? He said that two thousand years ago. Two thousand years ago he said in Romans 13:12, "The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." How are we today to understand the statements in the New Testament that the coming Christ and the triumphs of his appearing will be soon, and yet two thousand years have gone by?

There is one book in the New Testament that addresses this issue directly, 2 Peter.

Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." . . . 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Peter's way of handling the delay of Jesus' second coming when people began to ask this question is to draw attention to God's peculiar relationship to time. "With the Lord . . . a thousand years [is] as one day." So taking my cue from Peter, I want to close this morning by imagining a conversation between Paul and the Lord who is guiding what he writes. It goes like this:

**Paul:** O Lord, how long? How long till this great enemy is finally removed and the troubles of the church come to an end?

**The Lord:** It is not for you to know. My Father has the time fixed in his secret councils. And he is infinitely wise and infinitely good.

**Paul:** Lord, could it be long—hundreds or even thousands of years?

**The Lord:** And if it were a thousand years—or two thousand? Would that be long? A thousand years is like a day with me.

**Paul:** Lord, how then should I speak of this coming triumph? What should I say about the time?

**The Lord:** Be true to me the way I really am, and say what will help people be ready at my coming. They must not think that they can presume upon my delay. For if they do, they will drift into patterns of indifference and be snatched away to destruction in a moment.

**Paul:** So do you mean, Lord, that I should say that you are coming soon even though I don't know that from our side whether it will be soon? That would not be a mistake to say that?

**The Lord:** No that would not be a mistake. Say that. It will cause some to stumble, like many other things that I say. Scoffers will come and ridicule my promise. I know that. But if you give the impression that it will not be not soon, you will do far more damage to the truth and to the souls of men than if you stay true to my timeless haste and help the people be always ready and full of hope.

**Paul:** Lord, if a thousand years or two thousand should pass and you do not come, what should your people think who read these words in those days? Will they not think, So many hundreds of years have come and gone, there is no reason to think it will be soon any more or that our lives will be interrupted by his appearing?

**The Lord:** They should remember that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. It will be sudden and unexpected by almost everyone. The world will be going on as usual (Luke 17:26-31). And sudden destruction will come upon them. Pray for them, Paul, that they not stumble over the word soon. Pray that they will know that for me it will be soon, and for them it will be sudden. Pray that they will understand that expecting it to be soon is the best way not to drift into indifference and be snatched away in destruction.

**Paul:** Thank you, Lord. You know that I would love for you to come back while I am still alive. I would love to be clothed with life rather than stripped of my body in death. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.

**The Lord:** Paul, my dear servant, your desire for me and my quick return is a great honor to me. I would not want you to desire anything less. Finish this letter to the Romans and pray that those who come after you will have your same desire. And until then, never forget—and don't let the people forget—when I come I will crush Satan under your feet. My grace be with you.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.