



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans: 16:17-20

“Crushing Satan”

Romans

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, our Scripture this morning is Romans, chapter 16 – we're getting close to the end – and we'll look at verses 17 through 20. We have one more lesson after this. It's tough to leave the book of Romans. It's tough to leave any book you've been in for awhile, but particularly this masterpiece of the apostle Paul and really the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit. This morning, we're in Romans 16 beginning with verse 17.

And Paul writes, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned and turn away from them, for such men are slaves not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites, and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you. But I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the time we have to be here this morning. What a privilege it is to gather with the saints, to gather with men and women, young and old alike who've put their faith in Jesus Christ and are members of your family, and have a glorious future. We're reminded of that in our text this morning. We're

reminded very strongly, Paul prophesied the demise of the devil and the future victory of the saints.

What a glorious thought and what a great encouragement to know that we are going to be triumphant; we are triumphant; not in our own strength, of course, but in the strength of our Lord God. We are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is within us, and we are in your hand, Father. And so the day will come when you will crush Satan under our feet, cast him under our feet and we will triumph over him. What a glorious thought that is. And so, Father, give us the encouragement that we should have from that.

We have work to do. We are to go forward into this world and shine as lights, have the truth, declare it, live it, oppose error in the right way at the right time. So make us skillful, Father, in doing that, and give us the boldness to do so. And we can have that boldness, and we should have that boldness because of what we read here, that we will be triumphant. We give you the praise. We thank you for the time we have to study this text and consider those thoughts, and we pray that as we do so, you'd teach us and apply them to our hearts.

Open our hearts to receive this truth and guide us in it that we might be more learned, more understanding of what we're to do, what we have in Christ, and then live vigilant lives, vigorous lives as servants of you in the midst of the world. Bless us spiritually in this hour; and we pray also that you bless your people materially. We thank you for all of the good gifts you give us, and you give us an abundance.

We have so much in this land and we take it for granted. We're so used to the material wealth that surrounds us, and that we each possess that we, as I say, take it for granted. It comes from you, Father. We have every good and perfect gift from you; yet the danger in having so much is that it becomes too important in our lives. We pray that you prevent that from happening, or disabuse us if it has happened from such an affection for the things of this world. And help us to know and to focus on the things that are really important, the spiritual things in life. But, nevertheless, we

thank you for the good things you've given us, or the possessions that we have, for the wealth that is so abundant; and the health we possess is a gift from you.

And we think of those, Father, that lack these things, who lack employment. We pray that you provide that and give encouragement in the midst are what are, for many people, difficult times. We pray that you'd open doors of opportunity. We pray for the sick and those who are recovering from surgery. We pray that you give encouragement, and bless doctors as they attend to those who are in difficulty, and we pray that you give them healing as well.

We pray, Father, that you bless us this evening as we return here and as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we pray that you would bless that meeting and cause us to always remember that we are to do that, and we're to do it regularly. But we do it temporarily. We do it till Christ comes; and that day is coming. Paul reminds us of that in our text, and we should be living for that. And so we pray that we would have that perspective, that we would live faithfully in the meantime, but do so looking for that future day of our Lord's appearing; and we pray that it would come soon. Now prepare our hearts for our time of study and worship we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] It's always good to sing great hymns. Luther's A Mighty Fortress is our God, and in that hymn, we sing the stanza, "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 fail him."

What that expresses and what Christianity teaches is that God's people have the assurance of ultimate victory. We have hope. The world has no hope; no certain hope. It may be optimistic about man's possibilities, but it can't answer the fundamental questions, "Where did I come from and where am I going?"

There must be revelation to know that; and that is what we have in the Bible, which teaches that we are from dust, but destined for glory. History is not cyclical and meaningless like some great wheel endlessly turning and repeating itself, but going nowhere. History is linear and on a straight path to God's kingdom, when

Christ will return, defeat the devil, and reign upon the earth. That's the goal of history. The resurrection and the world to come.

In the meantime though, we have work to do; we have battles to fight. And the enemy is strong. Luther called him the prince of darkness grim, but he appears as an angel of light. And so we must be wise and we must be vigilant. That's Paul's counsel to the Romans here in this last chapter of the book, in chapter 16:17-20. It is a warning and it's a warning that comes rather abruptly, unexpectedly.

Paul is finishing the letter. He gives greetings to his friends in Rome, and is about to send some greetings from his companions in Corinth when he interrupts himself with a warning. But what appears abrupt is really appropriate. Paul has just instructed the Romans to be united and to greet one another with a holy kiss, receive each other as brothers and sisters in Christ."

Then he adds a word of caution because not everyone who comes to church is a genuine brother and sister. There are enemy agents in assemblies just like they are in governments, and Paul knew that very well. He dealt with them, he'd done battle with them, and it may be that his mention of all the churches of Christ sending their greetings to the church in Rome is what prompted him to think about this, to have this concern in his mind about the church in Rome. And what he thought of all the churches he founded, he thought of the struggles that he had had, the trouble that people had caused, and how that was always a threat for the church. And so he naturally warns them, To guard against this very present danger. Don't be naïve, be wise, be alert.

John Stott divides the warning into a three-fold appeal. First to vigilance, second to separation, and third to discernment. Well the first of those is vigilance. Paul writes: "Now I urge you brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. The people they ought to be watching for are troublemakers. They cause divisions in the body, they cause hindrances, which means "stumbling block, scandals," literally speaking.

Paul was very concerned about that, very concerned to keep the church free from all of that, free from hindrances, and united. In fact, he's given a lot of instruction on that very subject about unity in chapters 14-15. So this was a great concern of the apostle Paul.

Now sometime, of course, divisions are necessary. Division' not always bad. It's necessary when the truth is at stake. In fact, this word "hindrances" or stumbling block is the very word that Paul uses of the Gospel because it is that for unbelievers. We can never compromise the Gospel for the sake of unity.

Loyalty to Christ causes to divisions, and in fact, will cut us off from people. If those who are loyal to Christ must always be watchful for those who would come in and disturb the real unity that the body has and divide a church. Discord is a work of Satan. God is a god of peace, not a god of confusion," Paul told the Corinthians. And so the clear signs that the devil is at work and not God are disputes and dissensions.

Now we have a good illustration that, a good illustration of how that occurs, a good illustration of the propensity for that to occur within the people of God from the history of Israel. Israel gives us great illustrations of the kind of dangers that we face in the church. Almost from the time the people left Egypt – and, really, if you look at the story in Exodus, even before they left Egypt – but from the very beginning, they were grumbling. The people doubted God, they threatened Moses.

The critical moment came when the twelve spies returned from scouting the Canaan. They were divided over Israel's ability to conquer and possess the very possession God had promised to give them. Ten said, "No, we don't have the ability, we can't do it, there are giants in the land; we're like grasshoppers before them. Two said, "Yes, we can. We can go in and conquer it."

Unbelief 1: The ten spies produced dissension in the nation and rebellion that led to judgment. And as you know 40 of wandering in the wilderness. Well that's the kind of thing that Paul was concerned about, to protect the churches from that, Paul

told them to keep an eye on those who caused dissensions. To prevent them from having an influence within the assembly, because dissension, disruption of that kind, is deadly to a church.

Now sometimes Christians can be the source of the problem. They can be troublemakers due to immaturity, due to pride for various reasons. Saints grumble quite often. So we have to guard ourselves, guard our own hearts against that. But Paul is speaking of something different here. He's referring to unbelievers, people who come into a congregation and begin to have an evil influence.

There are people like that who move from congregation to congregation. The hindrance or stumbling block they cause is the result of false teaching. These are not believers. These are people who go contrary, Paul says, to the teaching of the apostles. All the churches had the teaching of the apostles as their standard. They did not have the fullness of it, but they had the basics of it. They had the standard of truth and conduct, and it is preserved for us in the New Testament. And Christians could evaluate the genuineness of a person's ministry by whether or not he or she met that standard.

And we have the standard of the Christian faith here in the book of Romans. We have it from the very beginning, the first four verses of the book Paul gives us an example of a standard for truth in the Christian ministry, because there he describes Christ as being the Son of God and the Son of David; of being both God and man. He stated that He had been declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. So he's the God-man who died for sinners and was raised again. That's fundamental to the Christian faith.

Now that is a standard of genuine faith. If a person preaches a Christ different from that, his preaching is not true. And in the first centuries of the church, there was a lot of false teaching. The Ebionites Jewish sect denied the deity of Christ. They expressed loyalty to Him. He was a great man, they recognized Him as the Messiah, but only a man. The Gnostics, the widespread Greek cult and way of thinking denied the true humanity of Christ. And then later, the Arians recognized His humanity and

affirmed that He was more than a man, more than the angels, but He was less than God.

And all of that is with us today in one way or another, in one form or another. Some of it is the theology of liberalism, some of it the ideas of the cults, but they all deny that Christ is Very God of Very God. Others may accept the deity and humanity of Christ, but deny the sufficiency of His sacrifice for sin and teach that we must add some work to the work of Christ. Christ is the Son of God, He died on the cross, He was raised from the dead. And that death was necessary but it's not enough.

We must do some work. We must observe the sacraments, we must be baptized, we must keep the mass and so on. All of that is contrary to the Gospel that Paul preached and preached, and unfolded and explained here in the book of Romans, which is a salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone who is the God-man crucified, and raised again, and seated at the right hand of the Father. But there are many forms of error.

From the description Paul gives in verse 18, the false teaching he warned about seems to have been a form of antinomianism, meaning it was against law, against God's moral law. For such men, he says, "Are slaves not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetite." Literally, that is slaves to their own belly. It's a graphic description of self-indulgence.

And these guys were not uncommon, which is very interesting and very telling, I think, because the church wasn't very old when Paul wrote this letter; perhaps 30 years old; and, yet, there were a lot of these people. And I say that's telling because what it indicates is the vigor of the devil. Satan is diligent; he's active; he doesn't sleep. Paul used the same description of these people in Philippians 3:19. He warns of those, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite," their belly.

What a pathetic life. These are people who prey on others; who live for food, for money, for pleasure, for ego, for self-gratification. Their lives and their motives

are governed by their appetites and so they don't subject themselves to God's law. They live as a law unto themselves, doing whatever will gratify self, whatever will be satisfying to their pride, whatever will fill their stomach. They live for pleasure; they live for self.

That's the motive for their so-called ministry. It has nothing to do with serving Christ and His people. Paul says that they are not slaves of Christ, but slaves of their appetites. Their motive is satisfying self. Their method for doing that is given in the rest of the verse: "By their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." In other words, they are clever and subtle men who come into a church in a disarming and unsuspecting way.

When I was in junior high, we read a poem by Carl Sandburg called *Fog*. I think I even memorized it. It's one of those that I could memorize because it's about four lines long. But it begins: "The fog comes on little cat feet." Now at the time, not being familiar with poetic imagery, and language, and metaphor, I was very puzzled by that line. I thought, "How can fog have feet?" I was thinking a little too literally.

But the teacher then explained to the class, "Well, cats walk quietly and fog comes quietly; unnoticeably." Well that could describe error, an aorist; heretics. They don't enter the church with noise, they don't come at the sound of trumpets, they come on little cat feet. They don't arouse suspicion. They come as an eager believer. They come as people who want to contribute to the ministry. They creep in like fog and they cause a fog. They blind the unsuspecting to the truth.

Their method is an old one. In fact, it was tried and proved by their master at the very beginning long ago in the garden, and we learn a great deal about the wiles of the devil from his conversation with Eve in Genesis 3. Satan entered the garden and approached the woman as a concerned friend, and he began talking to her about God.

Well that's a good subject. In fact, that's the greatest subject. We talk about Christian fellowship and what Christian fellowship is. Well it's talking about God and the things of God, and that's just what he did. He wanted to talk to her about God's

Word, the one rule or prohibition that God had set. He didn't come as the adversary that he was. As my Hebrew professor, Dr. Waukee, put it, he came to her in the guise of a winsome angelic theologian. He was that; he was winsome. He was cheerful and charming, and he came to Eve as a friend.

So he disarmed her, and he came as one who had true knowledge of God and he wanted to talk about the things of God. And the first thing Satan did was cast doubt on all of that: cast doubt on God's Word, cast doubt on God's goodness. Indeed, he asked, "Has God said?" I can just imagine the devil saying this with a tone of utter astonishment, almost disbelief: "Has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden? Has he really done that?"

Now he knew that the Lord had not done that, had not restricted them from every tree in the garden, but he does this as a way of introducing himself to her and showing great concern for the woman. He's one who has her best interest at heart and suggesting that God did not. So he begins his temptation by putting in the mind of Eve doubts about God's benevolence, about his goodness.

Well she, as you know, corrected his question and explained, "No, it's not every tree. It's just one tree. We're not to eat from it or touch it," she adds. And if they did they would die.

Well at that point, Satan becomes much bolder in his conversation and he went from questioning God's goodness to denying his truthfulness. "You surely will not die," he said. I'd like to know the tone in which he said that. I can just imagine it's just kind of this shaking his head, "No, no, no. You're not going to die." And maybe even at that point, he touched the fruit: "See, it won't kill you. You're not going to die."

And then he gives the explanation for why this rule had been established in the first place; it was to keep her from being fulfilled, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and

evil." In other words, "God is depriving you with this rule. God is keeping you back from being all that you can be and all that you should be."

So this is how he approaches Eve, and Eve believed what he said. The result, of course, was disastrous. She rebelled, she broke God's law, she ate, and died: spiritually, immediately, and ultimately physically.

Now that's how temptation occurs. We first doubt God's goodness, then we disbelieve His Word, and finally we rebel, thinking that disobedience is the way to reach our full potential, to obtain real happiness. And error enters the church in much the same way that it entered the Garden, and with the same result. Men with a false gospel come. They don't come as men with a false gospel, they come in disguise, they come as wolves in sheep's clothing, and maybe charming, winsome people, attractive in many ways. They may speak of good things; speak of compassion, and tolerance, and social justice; issues that may very well be important to hear.

And they know the Bible. They may even quote it, and do so effectively. They may preach their theology with conviction and real conviction, and be quite convincing: erudite, articulate, persuasive. I say they may be; Paul says they will be. It's just the way these men come. They come proclaiming their theology with conviction and persuasion, but it is a different theology with a different god, not the God of the Bible, not a god of holiness, not a god of wrath, not a god that requires blood atonement for forgiveness and life. And in denying that and denying the one way of salvation, or in preaching a universal salvation, they're just repeating the lie of the serpent, "You surely will not die."

So instead of seeking to serve God as their creator and governor and promoting obedience, they seek to avoid all of that. They seek to avoid the claims of God on them and they do that, first of all, by denying that the God of the Bible is God, questioning His Word, dismissing His Word. And then with God gone, then they can live the way they want to live; and they're very persuasive. The result is people who are deceived who receive that teaching feel free to do what is right in their own eyes,

to be a law unto themselves, to seek their happiness by gratifying themselves first in whatever way they like.

Now that's antinomianism, lawlessness; and that in some form was the danger Paul warned against. The right response to all of that is given in verse 17. Paul said, "Stay away from it. Turn away from them. Have nothing to do with teaching and teachers of error."

How do we apply that? Well, I would suggest one way is be careful what you watch on television. In fact, some television stations should not even be turned on. You shouldn't give the time of day to some of those men who come on television. That's one way in which we avoid this.

I think our Lord gives us the model for how we're to respond to the clever men who come our way. When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He didn't debate the devil; not because He couldn't. The Lord could have easily debated and wasted the devil with His mind that was far superior to Satan's. But He didn't do that. He didn't engage in debate because He responded the way that He was supposed to respond. He responded the correct way which has become a model for us. He responded to each challenge that the devil gave Him with Scripture, which means he never doubted God – which Eve did – He never doubted God's promises, never questioned His Word.

He began on the premise that this is true: "It's God's Word; therefore, it must be true. It can't be wrong." And so He dealt with every issue based on the Word of God. He interpreted the Bible correctly and relied upon it completely. Finally, after the third temptation, after He'd answered it with Scripture, He then told Satan to go: "Be gone." Dismissed him.

And the lesson in all of that is don't give your time and attention to false teachers and theological error. I don't think that the lesson is – there's no place for debate. Some men are gifted in debate, some men are called to do that, and we see that in the New Testament. Stephen debated in the synagogue. Paul did some of that.

Apollos did so as well. But for the most part, the point that Paul is making is, "Don't get into that. Don't familiarize yourself with these people. Don't become engaged in all of that."

Our Lord gives us the model. Answer it with Scripture, know what the Scriptures say, and dismiss those. Have nothing to do with false teachers and theological error. Instead, what you are to do since our Lord is the model is fill your mind with the Word of God. Know it; know it well. And if you do, you won't be naïve, you won't be unsuspecting, you won't doubt God's goodness and His Word, and you won't be carried away by heresy and all that follows from that – sin and immorality.

That's Paul's advice in verse 19. He commends the Romans. They were a mature church and well-known for their maturity and their obedience. They were a cause of rejoicing for him, he says. "But," He said, "I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent, and what is evil."

That's similar to the Lord's counsel to His disciples in Matthew 10:16, "Be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." In other words, know and follow wise instruction, and be unaffected by evil influences; or as John Murray put it, "Be immune to error."

Satan offered Eve the knowledge of good and evil by doing evil, which he promised would make them like God. It did the opposite, of course. Adam and Eve became like the devil.

Paul's counsel was, "Know good and avoid evil." We don't need to know evil. We are to know the nature of evil, we're to be aware of its presence, and where to avoid it. We need to know about it, but we don't need to know all about it. Instead, we're to fill our minds with good, with the things of God, with the doctrines of this letter, of this book, and the Word of God.

And that will be a lamp to our feet. That will give us wisdom and make us like Christ so that we won't be carried away by every wind of doctrine. We'll have stability. We'll have a fruitful life. We have a responsibility to not be naïve.

So Paul gives three means of defense, three protective measures. First: "Keep your eye on those who cause divisions." Second: "Turn away from them." And, third: "Be wise in what is good. Fill your mind with the things of God."

Do you want to be a fruitful Christian? Do you want to be a mature Christian, a stable individual, and a helpful individual? Well, be wise to what is good and innocent to what is evil. Be shrewd as a serpent and innocent as a dove. Know the Word of God. That's what we're to do. It's just the means that Paul advises.

Fortunately, our protection does not lie ultimately with us. It's God's work and He will do it, and that's the encouragement that Paul gives in verse 20 where he prophesies, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Satan is the agent of conflict and disorder. Through his ministers, the false teachers, he causes divisions in the church and he draws away people into error and sin. But God will crush him.

If it seems strange that Paul would describe God as the God of peace who crushes the devil, a God of peace who's warlike; if that seems strange, it shouldn't seem strange at all. Because God is the source of all peace, He must remove all obstacles to peace. And so to make the world whole, He must overthrow our great enemy; and He will.

Satan will be overthrown. That's the prophecy. And Paul gives it to encourage the Romans in their effort to increase in wisdom, to resist evil, and overcome false teaching. And it should be an encouragement to us because that's the life we're to live.

And we're to be active in all of that, and to know that Christian effort in all of these areas will not be in vain. We will triumph. That's the assurance that Paul is

giving us here. It's the assurance of victory, and it's assurance of victory that goes all the way back to the beginning, to the very first promise that God gave in Genesis 3:15. It seems that Paul had Genesis 3 in his mind when he was writing this warning.

That's what he seems to be eluding to, the prophecy where the Lord tells the serpent which Satan used to tempt Eve, that He would curse him, and ultimately crush him; that is crush the devil who was behind him. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head; you shall bruise him on the heel."

That's the first announcement of the Gospel. It is the promise of peace that God will achieve through the cross of Christ. There at Calvary, Satan bruised Christ's heel. He crushed His heel. He injured Him through the mockery, beatings, humiliation, and agony of the crucifixion. But it was only temporary. It was not a final defeat.

The cross was not ultimately fatal. It was like a crushing of Christ's heel from which He recovered because He was raised from the dead. The cross was not a defeat. It appeared to be one. It was actually the victory because it is where Christ accomplished atonement, it is where He made the full satisfaction for sin, paid the penalty in full, and satisfied God's justice towards His elect. And having paid for our sins, He transferred us out of the devil's domain and into the kingdom of light. The devil no longer has authority over us. His power was broken on the cross and his final judgment sealed.

Satan is still active, we know that; Bible's very clear about that. But as Luther wrote: "His doom is sure." And Paul says it will come soon. God will crush him under the feet of the faithful. It will happen at the Lord's second coming when Satan is bound, and then afterward, thrown into the Lake of Fire. That is the devil's destiny, and ours, by God's grace, is to triumph over him and his forces.

So in the meantime until that day comes, that glorious day of victory, we are to fight the good fight and do so with confidence. Christian life is described as a battle

with weapons, with armor, but with victory. And we have the enemy described in various places, but one – perhaps one of the best-known and clearest descriptions of the enemy is 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul speaks of the deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. "And that's not surprising," he says, "because even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." And so his servants, the men in ministry, so-called ministry, present themselves as servants of righteousness, as preachers and theologians of the truth.

But we triumph over them in the present time by knowing the truth. That's the weapon that God has given to us. That's the sword at our disposal by means of which we expose error and we proclaim truth. It is the light that reveals false light, and the false teachers cannot triumph over God's people. That's the assurance we have in Romans 16. That's the promise that Christ Himself gave us in Matthew 16, the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church. And the evidence for that is abundant. History is filled with heresies that failed.

Commenting on some of the early ones, William G. T. Shedd wrote, "Ebionitism and Gnosticism were soon crushed out." And he could have added to that, "Arianism was routed." And they will continue to be. They continue to surface in various ways. But they will continue to be snuffed out, which is an encouragement to us as we work to do that, as we work to overcome error, because the battle ultimately is not ours.

We have responsibilities in it and we're to be vigorous in it. But, ultimately, it is the Lord's battle, and He will give us the strength, and He will give us the success. He enables us to triumph now in the present time, and ultimately, when the Lord return. It is God who will soon crush Satan under our feet; and it's God who is doing it now. And so Paul concludes that passage by invoking the grace of God on them and on us: "Grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." That's Paul's third benediction.

In chapter 15, verse 13; and in chapter 15, verse 33, he prayed that they would be filled with hope, with joy and peace. And here a third time Paul prays for grace,

his favorite subject. There's no greater subject than that. It's what we all need. And it's what we all receive.

We speak of common grace, which is God's goodness to all men. He causes the sun to shine on everyone. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Every good thing in the world comes from God, and we all get more of it than we deserve. That's common grace; it's for all men. Special grace, saving grace is for God's elect. He chose us before time apart from anything that we've done, Christ redeemed us by His death, and the Holy Spirit drew us to Him in faith.

That's special grace; that's saving grace. It is undeserved; it is God's free gift. And an aspect of that is preserving grace. It is sanctifying grace. It is the grace of God that produces perseverance in His saints; grace that changes us and gives us spiritual growth. And that's what Paul is speaking of here. That's what he prays for, and he prays for it because we need it, and we need it constantly. No victory in the present, or in the future, is possible apart from the grace of God; and God promises to provide us with it.

His elect will persevere because the Holy Spirit dwells within us to give us the life of Christ constantly. The Spirit is in us, our hearts have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and we are in Christ like branches in a vine, receiving His life, receiving His mind constantly; and Christ will never disown us. He said that in John 10:27-28, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me, and I give eternal life to them." That's life that's eternal; it doesn't end; we can't lose it. "I give eternal life to them and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." We are secure.

Paul told the Philippians the very same thing. In Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will perfect, will complete it, until the day of Christ Jesus." And yet interestingly, Paul prays for that. He prays for the grace that sustains: the persevering grace, the grace of sanctification. He prays for that which will produce the very thing that God promises.

So the fact that God promises it, the fact that God ordains it doesn't mean that we don't pray for it. We pray for the very thing that God has promised. Prays that God would supply the Romans with grace, and the Lord did that, just as He will do it for us. So the lesson is we're to pray for it. A lesson is we're to look to God, look to Him, look to the source of our peace, and our grace, and our joy, our strength – all of that – look to Him constantly for victory.

But this is not only a prayer for the favor and aid of Christ, it's also an act of worship. It is a recognition of Christ's deity. Grace is from God. That's an attribute of God, and Paul prays for the grace of our Lord Jesus. It is because Jesus is Lord, because He is God that we have confidence in Him; and our victory over the devil certain.

Luther stated in his hymn, "Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing? We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing." And then he asks, "Who is that man?" And he answers, "That man is more than a man. Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same. And He must win the battle." He must and He will.

"However much the church may be distracted and troubled," Charles Hodge wrote, "error, and its advocates cannot finally prevail. Satan is a conquered enemy with a lengthened chain; God will ultimately bruise him under the feet of his people."

"We are," as Paul said earlier in Romans 8, "more than conquerors through Him who loved us." What an encouragement that is. He will complete the work that He began in us. He will give us victory over sin and Satan and finally glorify us. That is the hope that every believer in Jesus Christ has.

Is that your hope? Do you know Christ as the Lord, Very God of Very God, and perfect man who offered Himself up on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for sinners? Do you know Him? Have you trusted in Him?

If not, you have no assurance and no hope for the future. Now you can scoff at that and you can dismiss that, but the end will come, and it's coming soon. You will die and then the judgment. But there is hope. There is a way of escape, and that is in Christ, our sacrifice. He paid the price for our forgiveness and salvation; and it is for all who simply believe in Him, who trust in Him.

So if you've not done that, do that; believe. Recognize your need of the Savior and trust in Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. God help you do that and help all of us who have to live the life that Paul has instructed us here to live, to be vigilant, and to fill ourselves with the good things of God. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness to us, and we thank you for this text of Scripture that gives us a healthy warning. May we be people who keep our eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching of the apostles, contrary to your Word. May we be aware of error and be guarded against it. And to do so, may we fill our minds with your truth; think upon that which is good, that which is beautiful; think upon the things of the Scriptures, and know them, and use them. Make us effective ministers of your truth we pray, and bless us to that end. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.