

## Romans 16:17-18

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Martin Luther, as quoted by Eberle in the *Epistel Auslegung*, says of Romans 16:17 and following verses:

This is said in opposition to all human doctrine. Paul is not speaking of contrary doctrines, but rather of doctrines placed alongside the true teaching,—that is, additions to the doctrine, which cause divisions. Paul calls that rival doctrine, a separate doctrine and an addition; and it is a stumbling block and an offense, a sidetrack on which people make a matter of conscience of their own teachings. Now the Gospel is a noble and delicate thing that does not endure additions or rival doctrine. If such a sidetrack is laid (namely a way to get into heaven by fasting, with prayers and suchlike works), then my soul is torn away from God to these works, and as a result I perish. So that road becomes my ruin and death... Human doctrines, be they ever so attractive, fall, and the conscience that is built on them falls with them; there is no escape from that.

In another place Luther says of Romans 16:17,

Of a truth, this passage throws light on innumerable passages in the prophets and psalms and attacks all precepts of men with marvellous power and emphasis and expressive words; therefore every Christian heart should keep them firmly and vividly in memory.

This is all that Luther has to say on this passage, but in my opinion he comes closer to the meaning and spirit of the passage than do many of the labored exegeses that came later.

More detailed discussions of the passage will be found in the commentaries on Romans by Philippi, Zahn, and Stoeckhardt. Hodge, who was professor at Princeton, gives a careful exegesis of it. Lenski pays special attention to it in an exhaustive explanation. Lenski agrees that it is properly cited as a *sedes* against all forms of unionism.

Dr. A. Brux, of the Missouri Synod, has a long explanation of Romans 16:17ff in which he attacks the traditional interpretation and contends that the warning applies only to those who deliberately and consciously set a trap to ruin Christians, and that therefore it does not apply to Lutherans or any other Christian denominations, since they do not deny the incarnation, the atonement, the divinity of Christ.

Interpretations with reference to the present controversy in the Synodical Conference have been given by Prof. Franzmann at Milwaukee, by Prof. Schumann in Saginaw in 1941, by Prof. Karl Koehler, and by Pastor Arnold Sitz in Saginaw in 1955, and just lately by Dr. Sasse.

This is, of course, only a partial list, and no two agree perfectly with each other, which perhaps is the reason why still another study of the passage has been requested for this pastoral conference. I offer it as the result of my own study of the passage and of the commentaries on it. In reaching my conclusions I have conscientiously tried to follow the injunction which St. Paul expresses in this same epistle and not out of connection with the passage under discussion, namely, chapter 14, 5<sup>th</sup> verse: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." No one should force his interpretation down your unwilling throat. Each one has to convince himself. Even if agreement should be achieved regarding the meaning of the articles, the significance of the participle and of the moods and tenses, and the translation of the nouns, there still would remain the matter of agreeing on the practical application of the admonition in the daily life of, the synod, the congregations, the pastors, the individual Christian,—all the more reason why each of us should be persuaded in his own mind. In

this connection we do well to heed another admonition in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter,—that we do not fudge and despise those whom we consider weaker in under’ standing than ourselves.

It has been contended that our passage stands isolated from the rest of the Epistle and that there is no connection between the divisions and scandals mentioned and anything previously referred to. It would be an amazing lapse on the part of Paul, if after writing such a carefully constructed letter he should end with such an isolated afterthought. Nor is it Paul’s way to throw in a pious admonition on the mere chance that it might apply. One must approach the passage with the assumption that it is an integral part of the whole and not dust an odd item thrown in at the end. The passage clearly is a warning against those who *cause divisions* and scandals and deceive the hearts of the simple.

If we go back to the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter we find that there Paul strongly emphasizes the unity that exists in the Christian Church between believing Israel and the converted Gentiles. He mentions “Gentiles” ten times in that chapter, and his prayer (v.6) “that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” refers to this unity created by the Holy Ghost (v.16). It is this unity of believing Israelite and converted Gentile that furnishes the reason for his wanting to go to Spain. He refers to that in this chapter. He also mentions a collection of money made in Corinth for the benefit of Jews in Jerusalem because that collection was motivated by the debt that the Gentiles owed for having been made partakers of spiritual things. That collection of money was a mark of unity between Corinth and Jerusalem. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, and what happens to him there will be of such intimate concern to the people in Rome that he earnestly entreats their prayers, so that he may visit them on his way to Spain. He then follows with the long list of greetings in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter.

There are 26 names in the list, names of relatives, acquaintances, co-workers, Latin names, Greek names; Jewish names. The accent here is again on the oneness of them all in Christ. He asks the Romans to receive Phebe and to assist her in whatever business she might have need of them; he remarks that not only he but all the churches of the Gentiles thank Aquila and Priscilla for having risked their lives for his sake. He bids them salute each other with the holy kiss, that customary sign of belonging together in Christ, and concludes the greetings with a salute from the churches of Christ outside of Rome. They all belonged together, as is strongly emphasized by this friendly, happy, grateful mention of name after name. There is not a barring note anywhere in the list of greetings.

The verse following these heartfelt greetings begins *Parakalw de uia v*. The particle *de*/is sometimes a mere stepping stone from one statement to another; again it can be strongly adversative, as in this instance. We may translate it here with “But?” or “Now”, thus placing the following admonition in sharp contrast to the picture of unity presented throughout chapter 15 and in the family picture of the 26 names in 16:1-16. The 17<sup>th</sup> verse reads in a literal translation: “Now I urge you, brethren, to keep a watchful eye on those who, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, are causing the divisions and scandals, and shun them.” One thing is certain, --there were people who were causing divisions and scandals, and Paul is, warning against them.

Who were these causers of divisions? In all of Romans there is no syllable in support of the assumption that they were Judaizers of the kind that were troubling the Christians in Galatia. Commentators have imported Judaizers out of Galatia into this epistle without good reason. Those were false brethren unawares brought in who openly opposed Paul’s Gospel; and they were Jews. A search of the Epistle to the Romans reveals only one mention of Jewish enemies of St. Paul. That is in 15:31, where Paul asks the Romans to pray for him that when he comes to Jerusalem he may be delivered from those who do not believe in Judaea. Those were not even Judaizers, but Jews who never even pretended to accept Christ in any sense. Furthermore, Acts 28:17 reports that when Paul arrived in Rome (that was at least three years after this epistle was written), the chief Jews in Rome whom Paul called together; assured him that they had not heard anything against him either by letter from Jerusalem or out of the mouths of their Jewish brethren. They even assured him of their desire to hear what Paul had to say, because “as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” From that it certainly appears that three years before Paul arrived, there had been none of the kind of hateful activity that threatened in Galatia.

Who then were they who were causing the divisions? We have already established a connection between the warning about divisions and the unity evidenced by the greetings and salutations in chapter 16 and the strong statement on unity found in chapter 15. Paul couples divisions and scandals as the work of the people against whom he warns. Does he mention these divisions and scandals anywhere in this Epistle? By way of parenthesis let me say here that instead of “offenses” as a translation of *skandalon*. I intend to use “scandals” in the sense that it once had in English and which the word *skandalon* always has in the New Testament. A *skandalon* is a trap into which a Christian may fall and which will cause his ruin and loss of salvation. In that sense I shall use the English “scandal.” We have considered chapters 16 and 15 and have there found a strong emphasis on Christian unity. Now if we go back one more chapter into Number 14 we find Paul saying, v.13: “Let us not therefore judge one another anymore, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” There Paul used (translated “occasion to fall”) and its synonym and alternate term *proskomma* (“stumbling block”), which has the same meaning as *skandalon*, the difference lying in the picture called up by each word. *skandalon* pictures the victim as caught in a trap; *proskomma* pictures him as tripping over an obstacle or as striking against it and being hurled back. In either case the victim’s ruin is pictured. In v.21 of this same chapter the same thought is expressed in verb form: “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth.” Some texts and the AV. add the words “is offended, or is made weak.” Here we have the very word (*skandalon*) that Paul uses in 16:17 with the addition of *proskomma* and *proskoptw*, all referring to the pernicious effect of what some people have been doing in the Roman congregations

True, Paul in Chapter 14 is speaking of foods and the distinction of days, but he says that even foods and days can be made into an occasion to fall and warns that with meat one may destroy one for whom Christ died. “For meat,” he says, “destroy not the work of God,” (v.15 and 20) The effect of the activity of certain people is the creation of *skandalon* and *proskomma*, a scandal and occasion for falling, which means that one for whom Christ died is destroyed.

In the search for the identity of the causers of the divisions and scandals, why go all the way to Galatia to drag in Judaizers, who are nowhere mentioned in this Epistle, or even as Dr. Brux does, invent deliberate, anti-Christian setters of death-traps, whose avowed purpose it is to catch the unwary Christian in a trap set to destroy him? Why go outside of the context of Chapters 1,15, and 16, especially when the very word that Paul uses to describe the work of the causers of divisions is used in Chapter 14 to describe the situation caused by the dispute over days and foods?

It is significant that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans shortly before he left Corinth to deliver the Corinthian collection to the poor in the congregation in Jerusalem. Now in Corinth Paul had to deal with a situation almost identical with that that was disturbing the Roman congregation in the matter of foods and days. In Corinth it had to do with the eating of meat that had been used in sacrifices to Greek deities. In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul uses the very same words that he employs in Romans 16, 17 and in Romans 14. The *skandalon* of Romans 16 and 14 appears in 1 Corinthians in its verb form *skandalizw* twice, and *proskomma*, “stumbling block” is also employed, for example, v.13 “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” That is, if my meat eating becomes a scandal to my brother, I will eat no meat at all, ever. So even & thing in which I have freedom may become a scandal if I use my freedom without consideration for the weak. The effect of the scandal is described in the 11<sup>th</sup> verse of 1 Corinthians 3: “And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?” These are almost the very words he uses in Romans 14, v.15. 20. In fact Romans 14 can be used as a commentary on 1 Corinthians 8. In the one case we have loveless, inconsiderate use of the Christian’s freedom, in the other legalistic discrimination of foods and days; both result in *skandalon* and divisions and cause the destruction of people for whom Christ died.

Why go outside of Romans to look for the causers of divisions? Is the language of Romans 16, 17 and 18 too strong for what Paul describes in Chapter 14? Isn’t the situation in Romans 14 serious enough to warrant the strong language of Romans 16,18? What is more serious than the destruction of one for whom Christ died?

I can come to no other conclusion than that those who are causing the divisions and the scandals are to be found among those who in Romans 14 are warned not to destroy the work of God. v.20. This conclusion immediately clears up the difficulty of the specific articles used in our text, namely, the causers of the divisions and the scandals. Paul did not need to identify either the scandals or the scandal creators, because he had already described them in Chapter 14.

Here let me remind you of Luther's words quoted in my opening paragraphs "Paul is not speaking of contrary doctrines, but rather of doctrines placed alongside the true teaching,—that is, additions to the doctrine, which cause divisions." Note also that Luther's translation of Romans 16:17 reads: "*Neben der Lehre die ihr gelernt habt.*" These people were not denying the incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Divinity of Christ, but they were setting something alongside of that teaching, a sidetrack, as Luther so aptly calls it, that leads the soul away from God to works and finally into ruin. and death. These people were not open blasphemers, were not easily recognizable gainsayers, open deniers of the truth of Christ. We shall note a little later that they deceived the simple with good words and fair speeches. Perhaps that explains Paul's use of the unusual word *σκοπεῖτε*, translated "Mark" them, rather than the usual *βλέπετε*. The word has no sinister meaning in itself; in fact, with the possible exception of this passage, the word is always used in a good sense. It is used only six times in the New Testament, five times by Paul and once by Luke. A typical example of its use is 2 Corinthians 4,18: "While we look not (*σκοπεῖτε*) at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." The word means to "observe," "to watch," to keep one's eye on." So Paul uses the word here in the same sense as in Philippians 3:17: "Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example." Keep an eye out for such people, either to imitate, or in the opposite case, to avoid.

The AV translates: "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." I prefer Luther's "*neben*" to the English "contrary." The Greek *παρά* may be translated either way, But "contrary" does not fit into the context so well as "*neben.*" "Contrary" suggests anti-Christian teaching; whereas Luther's "*neben*" suggests the more subtle and more insidious rival doctrine, one that does not seem to touch the fundamentals; but sets up a teaching alongside that leads away from the center by "good words and fair speeches."

For a proper understanding of the 17<sup>th</sup> verse it is necessary to determine what the phrase "contrary to the doctrines modifies, whether it is adjectival, modifying offenses, in which case the meaning is "offenses which are contrary to the doctrine," or whether it modifies "cause." In the latter case the sense is: contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, they cause divisions. Even the various editions of the AV do not agree here. One copy of the AV that I use, a very old edition, puts a comma after "offense," thus making the "contrary" phrase adverbial, modifying "cause." The RSV agrees, but the *Chain Reference Bible* omits the comma and makes the phrase restrictive, modifying "offenses"

If Paul had meant that the phrase "contrary to the doctrine" should modify *τα σκάνδαλα*, he would have repeated the article and we should then have had *τα σκάνδαλα τα παρά τὴν διδασχῆν*, "the scandals, namely those contrary to the doctrine." But the article is missing, and since Paul is careful about that point of syntax we must conclude that he meant to say "Mark those who, contrary to the doctrine ye have learned, cause divisions and offenses." The point is illustrated by a comparison of Romans 8:3 with Romans 3:21.. In Romans 8:3 we read "he condemned sin in the flesh." The absence of the article before the phrase "in the flesh" shows that the meaning is not "sin in the flesh," but that he condemned it in the flesh, namely in the flesh of Christ. In Romans 3:24 in the phrase "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" the article is repeated after redemption just before the phrase "in Christ Jesus," which makes it certain that the phrase modifies "redemption" and must be read "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Therefore, in the absence of a repeated article after *τα σκάνδαλα* we read, "Mark them who contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned are causing the divisions and scandals." Their activity is not in line with the doctrine that ye have learned, and that makes them creators of divisions.

The next phrase that engages our attention is "the doctrine that ye have learned." Karl Koehler, in his essay on Romans 16:17ff. insists that *διδασχῆ* cannot be properly understood apart from the verb *διδάσκω* and the other noun from the same root *διδάσκαλος* or teacher. In that he was of course right. If anyone understands

“doctrines” here in the sense of dogma or of a certain doctrine, say of original sin or of justification, as such doctrines are treated in a dogmatical treatise, he will be led astray and will misinterpret Paul.

It is idle to ask: “Which doctrine, of those treated in our dogmatics texts, is Paul referring to?” Dr. Brux insists that Paul refers only to fundamental doctrines that touch the very person of Christ and that the contrary doctrines are those that remove the very foundation from under the Christian Church. Dr. Sasse too believes that the contrary doctrine here refers to the heresies that destroyed the Gospel of Christ, the great heresies of ancient times and the heresies of the grosser sects of modern times. Luther’s interpretation has much broader coverage. He includes all human doctrine as apart from and in addition to the teaching of Christ.

Those who take doctrine in the dogmatical sense will be inclined to follow Dr. Brux in one direction or Dr Sasse in another direction. Dr. Brux says that the passage does not prevent the unionism of prayer fellowship with any who still look upon Christ as the Savior Son of God. Dr. Sasse says that the passage does not apply to Lutherans who still accept the Lutheran Confessions but does apply to Calvinists who by implication deny the perfect union of true man and true God in Christ by their false teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper in particular.

Paul refers to the *didachē* that the Christians at Rome had learned. What is that *didachē*? As remarked a few paragraphs earlier the word should be understood in connection with all the other words from the same root, all of which have to do with teaching, and its correlative “learning.” The two go together, as in our passage: “The teaching which ye have learned “ In the New Testament this word in the various forms of noun and verb occurs about 200 times, so that there are plenty of examples to show what the words mean. Look for example at one of the earliest uses of the word in Christ’s ministry, Mark 1:21ff: “And Jesus entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority.” And v.27: “And they were amazed, saying ....What new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.” Such passages can be multiplied many times. Or to take a passage from the Epistles: 2. Epistle of John v.9: “Whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he bath the Father and the son.” Does John mean the doctrine concerning the person and nature of Christ as developed in the Athanasian Creed, in the form of a dogma, or does he take the word in its fuller and more comprehensive sense of “teaching?” I am firmly convinced that what John said was this: “He that abideth not in what Christ taught, hath not God.” Christ taught the way to God; and he that chooses a different way does not come to God.

In that broader sense the word *didachē* must be used in Romans 16:17, because that is the way the word is used elsewhere in the New Testament. We need not go outside of the Epistle to the Romans to find what teaching Paul meant here. In fact, we need not go outside of the immediate context of the passage under discussion. It is always correct procedure to stick as closely as possible to the context. Suppose we do that here. “Keep an eye out for those who, contrary to the teaching you have learned, are causing divisions and scandals.” There is no need to go into the meaning of divisions. Divisions break up unity. Now unity is precisely what Paul had been talking about in the chapter preceding this one. What they had learned and what those causers of divisions are upsetting is the Unity that Paul had written about from the beginning to the end of Chapter 15, Take a closer look at that Chapter. By way of variety I quote from the RSV, although there is nothing special about its rendering; it is a little easier to understand than the AV translation.

Beginning at the first verse of the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ *did not please himself*; but, as it is written, the reproaches of those that reproached thee fell on me, For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such *harmony* with one another, *in accord with Christ* Jesus that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is Unity—living in harmony with one another, *in accord with Christ* Jesus, with one voice glorifying God the Father. This is another kind of three in one, Christians with one another, in accord with Christ, with *one voice* glorifying God. In the next section of Chapter 15 Paul reminds the Romans of the unity God created, according to prophecy, between Jew and Gentile, and in the third section

he expresses the hope that he, who is the Apostle of the Gentiles who have now been brought into this unity, may bring some fruit of the Gospel to the Romans on his way to other Gentiles in Spain.

The Roman congregation knew about this unity, in fact, they themselves were an example of it, a Latin-Greek-Jewish discord made into a harmonious One by the Holy Spirit. This is what they had been taught. Now contrary to all they had been taught, there were people who were upsetting this harmony and Unity, by introducing into the congregation such sidetracking human teachings as compulsory distinction of meats and days. Cf. Chap 14. It was no spectacular, blasphemous heresy that was causing the divisions, it was over such things of the belly as foods and holy days.

There is plenty of blasphemy against Christ in our day, as there was in Christ's own day on earth; but the cursing and spitting comes from those outside the circle of disciples. I recall only one outstanding heresy within the Church in its earliest days, that is the denial of the resurrection of Christ by some people in the Corinthian congregation. The causers of divisions in apostolic days and even in the fourth and fifth centuries operated in more subtle ways. In Corinth the danger to the congregation lay in the ambition to be thought wise and to be like the world about them, and in their inconsiderate application of the freedom of the Gospels Circumcision, meats, days, dress look like harmless things, but it was just those things that were the instruments of destruction in the primitive Church. So also in Rome. Keep your eye on those people, says St. Paul; they are causing divisions and scandals; avoid them.

The verb translated with "avoid" is ἐκκλῖν. This word is used only three times in the New Testament, and in two of those cases the word is part of a quotation from the Psalms. One occurrence is Romans 3:12, where we read: "They are all gone out of the way." This is quoted either from Psalm 14:3, "They are all *gone aside*," or from the parallel Psalm 53:3, "Everyone of them is *gone back*." The other quotation is from Psalm 34:14: "Depart from evil, and do good," and appears in 1 Peter 3:11 in slightly altered form: "Let him eschew evil and do good." The only other occurrence is our passage in Romans 16, where the verb is translated "avoid." So we have four renderings of the verb,— "they are gone aside," "they are gone back," "depart, and "avoid." The Hebrew verb פָּרַשׁ which the LXX translate with ἐκκλῖν is very common in the OT and means "turn aside," to leave a road and to turn off into a different direction. The translation "avoid" is adequate; certainly better for modern ears than "eschew," and also better than "to go back." The phrase ἀπὸ τούτων, which follows, expresses the original idea well, to turn aside from them, that is, to avoid or shun them.

The word occurs here in the Imperative Mood; but whether in the present tense or in the aorist, is a question for the text critics to decide. Older, editions, like the *Polyglotten-Bibel* have the aorist imperative; Beetle, however, the text that is now generally used, has had the present imperative, at least since the 1927 edition. Whichever of the two is correct, the aorist or the present, the element of time is not involved. In the imperative mood, the aorist as well as the present may refer to the present or to future time. These tenses do not of themselves fix the time; they are really timeless. They rather express what some German grammarians call *Aktionsart*, that is the kind or nature of the action expressed. For example, if a dog is barking and his master says, "Stop it," he would use the Aorist in the Greek. If he wants to keep his dog from barking doesn't want him to start barking, he would say, "Don't bark" and use the present tense.

So if the aorist ἐκκλῖν is correct here, then Paul is saying, "Stop consorting with those who are causing the divisions." If ἐκκλῖν is correct, the present tense, is correct, as Nestle maintains, then Paul said, "Don't start consorting with them." In either case, of courses his admonition is to avoid and shun them. So much for the grammar of the verb. I shall leave the practical application of the admonition for discussion in a later paragraph.

The 18<sup>th</sup> verse is closely connected with the 17<sup>th</sup> by the particle γάρ, which here introduces the reason why such people must be shunned—"for such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own belly." These people may appear to be harmless, may even seem to be especially pious; but they are in fact rendering service by their activity, not to Christ, but to their own belly.

Note where the negative is placed, immediately before the verb δούλουσιν. A very literal translation would be: "They not-serve our Lord Christ." That however is un-English. But we do have an English noun that would express the idea: "They are rendering a disservice to our Lord Christ." Instead of serving Him, they are

“unserving” Him, to use another un-English word. Their service, instead of going to Christ, goes to their own *koil iā*.

Before going over to a discussion of *koil iā* and its translation “belly,” let us consider briefly the meaning of *doul euein*, “to serve.” The word is used only one other time in these three connected chapters, 14, 15, and 16. But its use in that other instance does throw some light on its meaning. The passage is Romans 14, 17-18: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” Now a *doulou* is admittedly a slave, and *doul euv* means “to serve as a slave,” but we must not press that meaning to the limit; and slavish service is hardly meant here where Paul speaks of serving Christ, in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, rather than in the legalistic distinction of meats and days. Now the same contrast between a meat-and-drink kingdom and the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost kingdom that appears in the passage quoted from chapter 14 also appears here in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter in the contrast between serving Christ and serving the belly, Christ is served when we do all things to his glory, when all spiritual gifts of the Holy Ghost are used for the furtherance of the kingdom of Christ, and when the gifts that Christ gave to men are used for the edifying of the body of Christ.

But those who are causing these divisions are not serving the body of Christ but their own *koil iā*. “Belly” is indeed a correct translation of the Greek *koil iā*. But we must remember that *koil iā* did not necessarily suggest the same thoughts to Paul’s readers in Rome that the word “belly” suggests to us. Among doctors *belly* is a perfectly familiar word for the abdomen and has no derogatory meaning for them, nor does it have any vulgar overtones in their ears. But even the dictionary labels such combinations as *bellyache* and *bellyful* as vulgar. But there is nothing vulgar about *koil iā*. Paul did not choose the word because of any sting there might have been in it. It had no special sting. He chose it because of its common and well understood meaning and the word is all the more effective here just because it has no vulgar connotation at all.

Outside of the Bible the word *koil iā* may refer to any cavity in the body of man or beast. In the LXX the word is used very often to designate the *womb*. It is also often used for the “hidden inner man,” *das Innere des Menschen*, the seat of thoughts and feelings. In Psalm 40:8, which the English Bible translates, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,” the LXX has *koil iā* for *heart*. In fact, in the LXX *koil iā* is a synonym and alternate for *kardia*, the heart.

In the New Testament *koil iā* is used 23 times and is translated either with “womb” (12 times) or with “belly” (11 times). Luke 2:21 is typical of the use of the word as a designation for the mother’s womb: “His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” There is no side-meaning to the word in any of these 12 instances; *koil iā* means *womb*, and nothing else.

Eight times where the word is translated “belly,” the belly is clearly that part of the body where food goes when we eat. A good example is Mark 7:18 and 19: “Whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him, because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats.”

John 7:38 exhibits a very interesting use of the word *koil iā*. The AV translates: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” Here the word “belly” is put to a very honorable use. John explains: “This spake he of the Spirit that they that believe on him should receive.” Even out of the *koil iā*, out of the belly, there should flow the quickening and refreshing effects of the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost.

The two remaining passages are Romans 16:18 and Philippians 3:19. The Philippians passage speaks of people whom Paul calls enemies of the cross of Christ, “Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” People who mind earthly things are here called idolaters, worshipers of the God “Belly.” The gross earthiness of the *koil iā* is emphasized in 1 Corinthians 6:3 where Paul says that our bodies are meant for incorruptibility, but that God will destroy, abolish, the function of both foods and the *koil iā*; they are earthly things.

Then who are those who are serving their own *koil iā* and who do not serve Christ? They are those who mind earthly things; those who exalt human doctrines and ideas and set them alongside God’s truth; they are

those who, as Luther said, create side-tracks that lead away from Christ to ruin and death. In Rome at the time when this Epistle was written, and in Corinth too, the human doctrines that were causing the divisions had to do with such things of the belly as meats, days, and sacrifices to idols. They were serving the belly and not Christ; they were making the kingdom of God a matter of eating and drinking, and thus were breaking up the unity of the body and creating divisions and scandals.

In Rome and in Corinth too the trouble started with such seemingly indifferent things as eating and drinking and observing or not observing days. Paul makes it clear to both congregations that if we eat we are no closer to God, and if we do not eat, we are no worse off; but he comes down hard in both congregations on those who cause divisions. The Romans 16:17 passage does not condemn those who eat nor those who do not eat; it does condemn those who cause the divisions and scandals that existed there. Those who mind earthly things, those who serve the belly, those who place human teaching alongside Christ's teaching, they cause the divisions, and against them are we warned.

It has been contended that this passage cannot be applied to the present controversy in the Synodical Conference, because the controversy among us has nothing to do with eating sacrificial meats or with observing certain days. That contention ignores the clear meaning of the passage, namely, that Paul is warning all Christians to shun those who create such *divisions* and scandals as were happening in Rome. What is it that has caused the rift in the Synodical Conference? Is it not the minding of earthly things, the exaltation of human doctrines? What is the religion of Scouting but a human scheme set alongside the Gospel as a rival road to perfection? What is the official religion as recommended for the armed forces but an amalgamation of all religions, on the assumption that all are equally good and true? Is that not a human doctrine and a thing of the flesh? What is the publicity hunger but a worship of an earthly thing? Is that not serving the belly? What is the glorification of union for its own sake but acceptance of and worship of the human doctrine that the light and hope of the world lies in Union of the Nations? When denominationalism is made the one great sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, then union is made into the great Sanctification. Is that not exaltation of a human ideal into a doctrine that rivals God's truth? Israel wanted a king like all the nations round about them. They were tired of being different and wanted to be recognized as being a nation like all other nations, not an oddity among the nations. Now those things are not harmless little peculiarities. They cause divisions. Have not things like that caused the division between us and our brethren of Missouri in the Synodical Conference? Have they not these many years been embarking on a course that is no longer parallel with ours nor identical with the one that is so well marked in their early history? That are we fighting about? Is it not that we are no longer traveling the same road? We no longer think the same way or speak the same language or judge by the same principles. The Union Negotiations, the Chaplaincy, the Scouting Alliance, the numerous cases of joint prayer at public functions with representatives of denominations not in fellowship with us are all cases in point.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> verse Paul continues: "By good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple."

How easy it is to adorn union negotiations with good words and fair speeches. Does not Christ himself pray that we all might be one as He and the Father are one? Not only the simple but theologians of experience are shaken when they are told that denominationalism is the Great Sin of the Church today, and that repentance and union are one.

It is very easy to stir the feelings of the simple, pious people, of honest, well-meaning Christians, with stories of the wonderful mission opportunities that the governmental chaplaincy affords. A few heart-warming stories of how the chaplain was able to comfort a scared boy who was about to go into battle, and the simple people are willing to accept the chaplaincy as a gift of God. It does good, doesn't it? Very little imagination is needed to adorn it with fair speeches.

An old and experienced lawyer once told me that he could not see how any honest man could have any objection to the program of the Boy and Girl Scouts. And now that the Boy Scout troop has been placed under the guidance of the pastor and safeguards have been created around its declarations of faith and principles, the simple heart is not just confused; it is, as Paul says, deceived by fine words and fair speeches.

Note Paul's use of the word *heart* (*kardiā*) in this verse. These people who mind earthly things and render service to the belly, following their natural appetites,—they deceive the *hearts* of the simple. The *koil iā*, the belly, in Old Testament use especially, is the seat of natural emotions and sentiments and appetites. Those things in the world that have a strong appeal to the *natural* likes, and dislikes and enthusiasms of man stir feelings and emotions in the *koil iā*. The heart, however, is the seat, again especially in OT use, of the higher, more spiritual emotions, such as love, fear of God, and so on. The emphasis should not be missed that Paul intended when he said that the causers of divisions serve their own belly and deceive hearts.

I said earlier in the essay that I would return to a discussion of the admonition to avoid them that cause the divisions. It has been said that “Avoid them” means “Have absolutely nothing to do with them,” and some attempt was made to base that interpretation on the use of the aorist in the imperative. First of all, it is extremely doubtful that the aorist is the form that Paul used; the better texts have the present imperative. And secondly, even if the aorist were correct it would not have the meaning expressed in “absolutely.”

Absolutely is a word that covers a lot of territory and is all-inclusive. The trouble with that word is that some people might really understand it and apply it according to its real meaning. St. Paul had written to the Corinthians not to company with fornicator. Some people understood that to mean that they should have absolutely nothing to do with them. Paul had to explain what he meant. “Yet,” he wrote later, “not altogether (*παῦτως*, absolutely) with the fornicators,” and then he gently ridicules their vehemence by adding, “for then must ye needs go out of the world.”

It has also been suggested (by way of criticism of the motion to break with the Missouri Synod) that avoiding them is equivalent to excommunication. That is not the case. Excommunication in Scripture and in time-honored Lutheran practice has to do with individuals who refuse to repent of manifest sin and have to be unto us as heathen and publicans. We do not excommunicate whole congregations, let alone whole synods. The most we can do is to declare ourselves as out of fellowship with them. “You and we,” we say, “are no longer of one mind and one spirit. We must go our way while you go the way you have chosen for yourselves.” The result, if a break comes, will be that the Missouri Synod would be to us what Ohio and Iowa in years past were to Missouri, and what the ALC is to us today. We have not excommunicated the ALC, but we do not have altar, pulpit, and prayer fellowship with than. And so it would be with Missouri if a break should come.

We are admonished to shun those who cause divisions. We accuse Missouri of causing divisions. Are we shunning them? We have reproved them for practices that we consider contrary to the word and spirit of the Gospel; we have tried to convince them of the wrongfulness of their actions, we have refused to become participants in those actions; we have warned them that we must declare ourselves out of fellowship with them if they persist. That, I maintain, is shunning; that, is avoiding them. How long must such shunning by reproof continue before physical separation takes place?

Although our admonition is not identical with the discipline that leads to excommunication, the principle laid down in Matthew 18 applies to all cases of admonition, namely this, that no effort to win our brother must be spared and that we give up only when he proves that he does not want to hear us. I do not, say that he must say in so many words that he refuses to hear us; he may say that he wants to hear and yet prove by his actions that he does not intend to listen. When that becomes clear, then the separation has been consummated and must be declared.

Is human judgment involved here? Of course it is, just as human Christian judgment must be employed in following Christ's precepts as given in Matthew 18. Christian judgment determines when to cease from single personal admonition and when to call in others to help in winning the erring brother. Again, Christian judgment must be employed in choosing the two or three who are to join in admonishing the sinner. The alternative to Christian judgment in the practical application of this and all similar precepts is the legalistic form of application. In the case of Matthew 18 the legalist counts the number of admonitions, and when he gets to three the man is out, with no time wasted. That method is efficient.

Avoid them! Paul expects the Christians not only to avoid them, but to know how to avoid them. Just what form that avoidance takes in actual practice he does not say. He leaves that to the Christian evangelical spirit, to the spirit of wisdom, of understanding, and of obedience to the Lord.

If admonition proves to be fruitless and it becomes clear that our two bodies are no longer walking the same path, then of course a separation must be publicly declared as having taken place.

Now this *ekkl ihete*, “Avoid them,” has a double edge. It is to be applied to those who cause the divisions. And we are the ones who are to apply it. We do the avoiding; how we do it is our responsibility. And we must not forget that we are responsible to God for the way in which we apply His word. The people whom Paul admonished to avoid certain others are exactly the same people for whom he prayed: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify, God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:5f.). Divisions and offenses there will be, but we must in no way be responsible for causing them.

If it becomes necessary to declare the break as having taken place, then will come a time of great danger and temptation for the Wisconsin Synod. The first danger will be the temptation to be complacent and self-righteous for having taken a firm stand. There will be a tendency to look upon drastic action and vehement denunciation as evidence of orthodoxy. There will be the temptation to brand the weak, and the moderate too, as rank unionists. There will be those who will gauge a man’s Christianity by his rigidity over against Missouri. Even now certain pastors are being called disloyal and dishonest because they expresse hope that a break would be avoided. Here I could furnish exact quotations.

Perhaps the greatest danger of all is the danger of resorting to quick legalistic action in dealing with the many practical problems that will have to be solved and that are bound to arise in connection with intermarriage, division of the family into opposing parties, social contact, business contacts, and even business partnerships. This may sound silly, but in the event of a separation, we may expect such questions as: May I hire a Missourian to work for me? May I invite a Missourian to dinner? May a Wisconsin pastor stop and talk with a Missouri pastor on the street? Should we let our children play with the Missouri neighbor’s children? May our colleges and schools employ Missouri Synod janitors? Should our high schools and colleges schedule basketball games with Missouri Synod schools? Questions like that are going to be asked, because some of them have already been asked. How are they and a hundred more like them, some of them much harder questions, going to be answered? We just must not think that if our controversy with Missouri is settled that our troubles will be ended. There is no such thing in church life or any other form of life as the end of troubles, and we don’t look for such a fool’s paradise here on earth.

If it is God’s will that we take this step, then let us plead that he strengthen us so that we may avoid the danger of complacency and legalism and self-glorification.

I close with St. Paul’s words: “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” Amen.