

Romans 16:17-27 | Kent Stiles

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good morning. As David said, we are concluding our study in the book of Romans.

So as you probably can imagine, I'm going to ask you to turn over to Romans and make your way to the last page, chapter 16.

We're going to conclude our study in this book of Romans. It's such a huge, huge thing. Just imagine we've now spent, we're coming to the end of the book of Romans here, and after weeks and weeks and months and months of walking through this book together, great book, letter of doctrine, and just a really rich book.

One of the first things I think we need to realize as we conclude here this morning is that we have really hardly plumbed the depths of this book. And I think that's true anytime you study the word. There's no passage that we can ever conquer.

There's no one that can stand back after looking through a book like Romans and say that we've just climbed this mountain and say we've now reached the summit. And we understand everything that this book has to offer or this text would tell us.

[1 : 13] We understand that this is not only the inerrant and the infallible word of God, but that it's also a word that's infinite in terms of its power. And so there is no way that we could ever exhaust it because we can't exhaust the divine author.

So a great time, but I would encourage you, as I'm sure you have, to go back time and again and take a look at Romans and see what the Lord would have to show you. I'm not a letter writer. I have written some letters in my life. My wife can probably attest to you that that art has decreased over time. It's kind of interesting. Maybe I shouldn't speak for all you guys, but my level of writing and Nicole has a box of cards pretty thick from when we were dating and when we were engaged. And I don't know that there's a box of any since we've been married. So I invested heavily on the front end and I paid my dues for many years.

So but if you have written a letter, you know, one of the hardest things to do is just to conclude the letter. Right. You write all these things are so important, so precious to you. And you say, I could just go on for days and days.

[2 : 20] So you have to wrap it up. And that's where we're at today for Paul is he is concluding this letter to the church in Rome. And sometimes the most important critical things, what's the last thought you want to be left with with with these people?

How do most of you end your letter that you might send to a parent or a child or a spouse? You finish the letter and you say something along the lines of told you so.

Or do you say, hope you got this or forget everything I just said? Most of us, we end that letter. What do we say? Love, love mom, love dad.

Love, Kent. So here we have Paul coming to the end of this letter. And we're going to see what does Paul see as so critical to implore or to impart upon the saints there in Rome after 16 chapters of such rich doctrine.

So we're going to look at that this morning. So before we open, let's have a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to come together. Lord, one more time together as a body and one less time before you return.

[3 : 20] Lord, we think about those prayer requests Jeffrey shared about Lorraine Fitzgerald. And think about Jim and, Lord, him being in your presence and her soon to be. And I think about how glorious a time that is.

And, Lord, for us as a body here, one day that will be true for us, be it by death in which we go to see you, Lord, or by your return. And, Lord, this morning we just ask that you would bless our time as we look at this last passage in Romans.

Pray that you would open our eyes and ears. We ask this in your name. Amen. Amen. So, like I said, we're going to start in Romans 16. We're going to start in verse 17. So we're going to finish or start where we left off last week when Tom shared with us.

And what we have here is Paul's wrapping up this letter to the Church of Rome. And he starts with these final ten verses in verse 17. And he says this. This is the first thought he wants to have for them.

He says, Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching for which you learned, and turn away from them. And in verse 18 he says, For such people are slaves, not to our Lord Jesus Christ, but to their own appetites.

[4 : 25] And by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. So here's what Paul starts out with.

We're going to see kind of three parts to this final ten verses. We're going to see this warning. And this is a warning for the Church. It's a warning, I think, for the leadership of the Church as they have the duties to protect the flock.

But I think it's also a warning to us individually as to who we engage with and how much we let false doctrine into our lives and infiltrating it. We're going to see him bring up a few names again that were co-workers with him in the work of Christ.

And then finally we're going to see a doxology at the end in which he gives glory to God. So we're going to cover all that this morning. But here in verse 17 he starts with, so he's given all this doctrine, all these points, and he says here, he brings in verse 17, he says, I urge you to keep an eye out for these people.

So this is a characteristic of Paul that when he writes the churches in his own apostolic capacity, he will warn them about false teachers. And you'll find this throughout his writings if you check Thessalonians and Corinthians and Galatians.

[5 : 32] You can look to see what he says to Timothy when he exhorts Timothy to maintain that pattern of sound words to guard the treasure that's been entrusted to you. One of the key issues in the book of Romans, as it is in other places in the New Testament, is the fact that there is a faith, as Jude says in his letter, one that's always delivered for the saints or to the saints.

It's an intact set of truth claims. It's a way of life. It's a transforming message of the cross. And it is to be received as a treasure.

It is to be perpetuated. Paul, we're going to see, we'll say to Timothy, that which has been taught to you in the presence of faithful men, entrust these two other faithful men so that they may be able to teach others also.

So there is this truth that is to be guarded. And there is a succession of faithful stewardship of these truths that we are called to.

But we know that along with these truths, Paul here warns us of this, there are false teachers. And in verse 17, Paul says this. He says, keep your eye on them. And one thing that we should note here in this particular phrase or that expression, it's one that's really as old as time.

[6 : 50] And it's that phrase. Let me ask you, when you were a kid, you probably remember your mom or your dad saying, hey, you better do what's right because I've got my eye on you.

Or I'm going to be watching you. And sometimes they'd say that and you weren't even with them, right? And so we realize that now as an adult, that's really a metaphor. They didn't really have their eye on you at that time.

But I'll keep an eye on that. It means watchfulness. It means that we are always on alert for the fact that we have to be looking out for trouble in our lives.

Looking out for trouble here within the church. Paul says, I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep your eyes on who? Who is the one that we're to be focusing on? Those that are doing good?

It's not what he says here. I urge you to keep your eyes on those who cause dissension and hindrances contrary to the teachings which you have learned. So all these teachings, he goes through Romans.

[7 : 45] And now he comes and says, you keep your watch. You keep your eye on. You look out for these people. And a very important issue here. You notice that he says, look to those who cause dissension and hindrances.

Or troublemakers. Dissenters. Those that would be quarrelsome. Do we know any people like that that we've seen in churches? I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand. I think we all have. And you know them when you see them. You know, where there is trouble in the church. Where there are factions in the church. Where there is fracturing of fellowship in the church. Where there's an argument.

Where there is a contentious spirit. You want to zero in on that. You want to keep your eyes on that. You want to keep watch. But notice what he says. Those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching of what you learn.

And that contrary to the teaching which you have learned is so important. Because sometimes it's those who would contend for the faith who are charged with creating dissension or hindrances. [8 : 49] And you don't have to look very far back in church history to know that there are those who will say, look, these people are dissenters. And they are creating hindrances by continuing to call the church back to biblical Christianity.

And you notice that's what Paul says. As Paul says, watch out for those who cause dissension and hindrances contrary. Not in alignment with, but contrary to the teaching which you learned. And turn away from them.

Or some verses will say avoid them. Stay away from them. Don't even entertain them. You know, there are liberal denominations right now in which the evangelicals are fighting the good fight. And they are often called dissenters. Well, they are dissenters with honor because they're calling the church back to the truth. They're calling their denominations back to biblical authority. Some of you may or may not recall a story from several years ago.

And I won't name the denomination. But there was one particular denomination several years ago in which this denomination held a heresy trial out on the West Coast. Of an openly lesbian minister who married or officiated a same-sex marriage ceremony.

[9 : 58] In which obviously was against the teaching of that denomination. And she claimed that she did so because of her conscience. Or due to her conscience.

And she was ultimately acquitted because the church officials decided that her right of conscience had a higher priority than the authority of the scripture.

Now that's a recipe that will lead directly to death. And any church or denomination that says that an individual's conscience, that it's higher than scripture, is a church denomination that has swallowed the poison pill of individualism or subjectivism.

And it's opposite to what you should have. You see, you have in that example those within that denomination that are standing up. And they are saying that these things are wrong.

And we will not stand for them. And we will have this church stand for biblical authority. And they may be charged with being dissenters. But they cannot be charged with being dissenters contrary to what things they had learned here in Romans.

[11 : 10] Now, on the other hand here, so that's, we want to look out for, there are those who are truly there calling for revival. Calling people back to biblical authority.

But on the other hand, Paul says when you find someone who's calling the church away from the faith, you're to turn away from them. He doesn't mince words. This is a harsh statement. Some people don't like this type of language.

It's not very loving, is it? To turn away, to cast them out, to not have anything to do with them. But the thing that's great about this is I didn't write this. And you didn't write this.

The apostle Paul wrote this with the divine inspiration from God. So it's a command of God. Have nothing to do with them. And there's good reason for that. And we'll look at that here shortly. In verse 18, he gives an explanation, a diagnosis of their problem.

And this is why. This is the reason why. He doesn't just say stay away from them and leave it be.

He's going to tell them this is the reason why. Verse 18. For such people are slaves, not of our Lord Jesus Christ, but of their own appetites.

[12 : 14] Or your version might say your own bellies or of your flesh. You know, now interestingly here, Paul's assumption, and you may have heard this before. You'll see it in Paul's writing. Paul's assumption is that every single human being is a slave.

You know, we are a slave to something. Not one of us is so powerful that we are self-defining. We are defined by something. We are claimed by something. We are serving some master, one or another.

Jesus himself spoke of this in the same way in Luke chapter 16 about serving masters. And here we have Paul saying, look, these men are slaves, not, however, to Jesus Christ.

That's Paul's own identification, a slave of Christ. And we are called as Christians to be Christ's slaves. He is our master, not our flesh, not our bellies, not our appetites.

He is our master. And so you and I, we don't belong to ourselves. Rather, we belong to him. Well, Paul says that those who would call the church away from the truth, they're not slaves of Christ, but rather they are slaves of their own appetite.

[13 : 23] And what this means is the heresy of this day, of this time, it was called antinomianism.

And it was the thought of this. It was that because you were saved, it doesn't matter what you do. It kind of goes along with what Paul addressed in Romans chapter 6 in verse 1. You know, should we continue to go on sinning that grace may abound?

In that sense, that was the leading heresy of the time. And it was because your body is physical and because it's going to break down, it doesn't matter what you do with it because it's a falling organism.

And so they say that you can be a Christian. And as Peter said, they promise men freedom while they themselves were slaves to their own corruption. If you want to have sexual relationships out of marriage, go ahead.

It's just the body. You can do what you want with it. If you want to get drunk, go ahead. Do with it. Do that. No problem. It's a bodily thing. It doesn't matter. And so it's like we're Christians and we're saved and we're on a higher spiritual plane, so it doesn't matter what the body does.

[14 : 32] And Paul said they are not slaves to Christ. They are slaves to their flesh. They do what their flesh says. I think we see that in the world today, right?

You're a Christian. That's all that matters. The rest of it is just gravy on top. And how does that work for the church today? Not very well. These false teachings make their way in.

Well, what else do they do? These false teachers. What else should we look out for? Well, verse 18 continues. It says, Or some versions may say the minds of naive people.

This is, I think, can be interpreted as the youth of the church. And I don't mean necessarily age, but in spiritual maturity. And that's not new either. Smooth and flattering words.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon warned his son about those that have the power of words. A very seductive power. A very persuasive power. Smooth words.

[15 : 30] These are words that can kind of sound good when they roll off the tongue. And they're very seductive. They're like lures on the end of a fishing line. They're so attractive that you would like to absorb them.

Or to receive them. To believe them. And they're flattering words. And that's a characteristic that these teachers have. And so false teachers, they quite often come in. And as a matter of fact, as Jude says, he says, they are hidden reeds in your love feast.

He says, they creep in unnoticed. Now that word creep in the Greek, it, excuse me, it means to come in alongside of.

Now if you're a gate crasher at a concert, if you're trying to sneak into a concert and you don't have a ticket, what do you do? Do you wait for everybody to go through and then by yourself you go through the line and see if you can get through?

No, you don't do that. You don't go by yourself. What you do is you get in a group of three or four who do have tickets and you walk along as if you belong, as if you're part of the group. You know, and they're hard to pick out at times.

[16 : 36] They have their crucifixes. They have their bumper stickers. They have the right words to say. They know the songs to sing. And they come in and they sit as hidden reefs. But once, interestingly, once you sit with them, once you hear them speak, once you talk to them, you'll oftentimes or generally hear that they're going to be very soft on sin.

They're going to have words that don't align with the truth. Paul says that their talk will spread like gangrene. They're like a cancer. And so we have to always be watchful.

Watchful. The leadership here has to always be watchful. We have to root that out quickly and not let it spread. What these false teachers also do down in verse 19 is they can be catastrophic to the entire church.

Look at verse 19. It says, for the report of your, and he's referencing here the Roman church, for the report of your obedience has reached everyone. It was a great church.

He says, therefore, I am rejoicing over you. Let me ask you this question. Do you think that a church, as good as the Roman church was, a church that had those guys that Tom had referenced last week in chapter 16, like Rufus, the son of Simon, of Serene, Priscilla, and Aquila, do you think that church is so strong that it cannot be knocked over?

[17 : 58] Is there a church strong enough that it cannot be bumped off by something? Does that exist in the world? No, there's not.

It doesn't exist. Ask Harvard. They trained ministers out of the first great awakening. You couldn't get a straight answer out of Harvard now, even if you went looking for it.

You know, ask Yale. It went liberal. How about Princeton? Truth is nowhere to be found. John Walvoord made an interesting statement. He said that it takes 40 years for a seminary to die, 40 years for a church to fall, because in 40 years, the guys that began the church, based on truth, they start to die.

And the next generation comes in, and Christians historically are always making golden calves. They make it look a little like Egypt, yet they call it Yahweh. They put their finger in the air to see which way the winds are blowing and go that direction.

They set their sails on what the world says, you know, that will trim the word, will trim the scripture to what the world wants. And instead of being in the light of Christ unto God amongst a world of those who are saved, amongst a world of those who are lost, instead we become peddlers and we become salesmen and we do whatever we can to make the sale and to get the crowd.

[19 : 24] Isn't that true in so many churches today? 40 years, Wolverine said, it takes for a church to die or to fall. You know, the point of verse 19 is this.

It's that error can not only take away the peace of the church by division, it can not only take away the babes of the church that harm them, but it can take away and it can sink and be catastrophic to the entire body.

Let me ask you this. Can denominations that used to be fundamental, can they fall? You bet they can. Can countries that have historically espoused to evangelicalism, can they fall?

The likes of Germany and such. Yes, they certainly can. Can an entire civilization in Western Europe embrace error to the point that there has to be a reformation and that Christians either have to run or die?

Can that happen? Certainly can. We've seen it. Third John, last book or toward the end of the New Testament, before Revelation, tells us about a guy who goes into a church and his name is Diotrephes, which is really a poignant name because trophus means to turn and Diotrephes means to turn thoroughly.

[20 : 46] It's a good name for a heretic. It's a good name for a heretic. It's a good name for a heretic, Diotrephes. And you know what he did? Read John 3, or 3 John. And when you get a chance, he commandeered the entire church.

This is a church that had begun with the apostles. And that's how we see the New Testament end. And this can happen, that a church can be completely commandeered.

And you can read stories for the rest of the day. How often do we hear about denominations and churches and pastors and civilizations that used to be and are no more?

It happens. And Paul warns against it. He says, don't let it happen to you. My prayer would be that it doesn't happen to us. Forty years.

So what do you do? In light of this warning, what do you do? Well, take a look in verse 19. Here's a solution. I want you to be wise in what is good. The way you stay fundamental is that you don't study error.

[21 : 49] Simply put, you study the truth. You are wise in the good. It's like people who work at a bank. They work with money. You would think that naturally the way to spot false currency is to study the false currency.

Well, that's not the case. At banks, they handle money. You think about tellers. They have monies going through their fingers all day long. And they handle so many bills that whenever a phony bill comes along, a counterfeit, the banker can spot it blindfolded.

Because the brilliance of the dollar bill is in the paper. You see, if you want to be a counterfeiter, you don't really want to copy the plates. You'd have to do that.

But that's not the hard part. The hard part is in the paper. If you could ever steal the paper, that cloth-like paper, that's when you could make a killing. If you could ever get a hold of that fabric.

Well, bankers, they feel these dollar bills over and over and over.

And they study the real deal, the true bill, so that when a phony comes along, they can spot it immediately. And that's how it is in the church. That people that know the Bible, that is the way that you keep your church pure.

[22 : 52] That you study the Bible. You study it. And then when you study it and error comes across, you can spot it like that and you can root it out. Because it does not conform to the truth.

Mark Bailey, Dallas Theological Seminary, he heard a comment in which he said that he had a Bible college president that said to him about doctrine, if it's new, it's not true.

And if it's true, then it's not new. All the truth is once delivered for all. And that's a good thing to remember.

When people come up with new ideas that you haven't heard before, there's a real good chance that you ought to have your antenna up and you ought to be questioning, is this true? So be wise. Be wise and good. And in verse 20, you don't have to be wise forever. The God of peace will soon crush. Who? So he didn't say it earlier.

[23 : 55] He didn't say it. But he finally says it here at the end. Who's behind all of this error? Satan. The liar and the father of lies. He will crush him under not just his feet, but your feet because of our co-heirship with Christ.

What is true of him is true of us and we will reign and he will reign and we will reign with him.

Incidentally, where does this verse that Paul references here in chapter, in verse 20, where does it come from?

It's the, what's referred to as a proto-evangelion. In Genesis 3.15, the first promise of the Bible, the seed of woman will crush the serpent's head.

The seed of woman will crush the serpent's head. Is God's word true? You bet it is. Are we going to win ultimately?

We are. So you hit yourself to the star. Satan will be crushed. Let me show you how. Revelation chapter 20. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also.

[25 : 06] And they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. God's going to win. You want to follow evil? That's where it ends. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it.

And the death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one of them, according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

You want to defy Christ, invent your own truth, follow after Satan, then that's your end. And then in chapter 21, a new heaven and a new earth, and Christ and his people reign forever.

Again, we're going to win this thing. God is going to win. But we need to be watchful. We need to keep lookout. Well, the last few verses of this letter, as with many letters in the New Testament, is a song of praise to God.

That Paul had written a lot of things to the church in Rome, and he reminded them of the gospel. He encouraged them to be a one, unified church. And he exhorted them to continue the work of God and to rejoice in their faithfulness.

[26 : 21] He then brought the letter to a close by praising God. But first, he greeted a few more people. In Romans 16, 21, down to 23, it says, This is kind of an extension of what Tom had shared last week.

Paul acknowledged more people who worked alongside him in the ministry. He didn't just work alone, just as we do not work alone. Jeffrey shared some announcements this morning.

You've got a camp like Turkey Hill. There's 1,500 kids that go through there in a given summer. Do you think there's only one person down there who does all the work? Certainly not. There are hundreds of people that are involved.

You have a camp in Ironton, Missouri, where hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kids go through there every summer, where the gospel is shared. That's not done by one person. It's not done by one church.

It's done by many. So these are co-workers, and we should be looking for those opportunities to share in the ministry, as these people did here with Paul. Well, after these final greetings, Paul then closed the letter with a wonderful doxology, a song of praise.

[27 : 45] Now, some of your Bibles, incidentally, they, and I'll just make this as a side note, they may not include verse 24, depending on what version you're using. Those that do have 24, you might notice that it's in brackets.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. It seems to be repetition to the closing words of verse 20 with some slight variations. And so just making a note that some manuscripts don't include it and some do.

It doesn't take away from the word. But I just want to call that out, lest you think I am skipping a verse here this morning. So we'll jump down to 25. And it brings us to this last passage of the book of Romans.

And the book ends with a doxology. And the word doxology, it comes from two words in the Greek. The word doxo, which means glory or praise. And legion, which means to speak.

And so it means to speak of his glory. And the word of God is filled with many doxologies. The book of Psalms was the hymn book of the Hebrews. And there's 150 separate Psalms, which they recited or they read or they sang.

[28 : 50] And it's divided into five books. And so these 150 Psalms, they have those five separate books. And they speak about the attributes of God. And they speak about the work of God.

They speak about the power of God, though his wisdom. And at the conclusion of each of these five unique books, you're going to see a doxology. Book one, for example, it runs from Psalm 1 through 41.

It ends with this doxology. It says, And you'll see that time and again throughout Psalm over the next four books, so to speak.

Well, here in Romans, we come to Paul's doxology. And there's a clear parallel in Romans between the closing doxology and the opening 11 verses of Romans. In fact, they deal with much of the same material.

You'll notice, for example, the word establish in verse 25. In chapter 1 verse 11, Paul says this, For I long to see you that I may impart some spiritual gift to you that you may be established.

[29 : 56] So he comes back to that same thought. In the closing doxology, he talks about the obedience of faith. And again, if we go back to chapter 1 verse 5, he writes, Though whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name's sake.

So in this verse, he speaks of the obedience of faith amongst all the Gentiles. And in the ending of the doxology, he talks about the gospel being made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.

So Paul ends his letter where he begins his letter, strengthening the believers with the gospel that leads to the obedience of faith amongst all the nations.

And let's take a quick look at these last three verses as we close. If the musicians want to go ahead and make their way up here. Romans 16, 25 to 27 says this, Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. So when Paul mentioned that God is able to strengthen us, Paul wants to strengthen, or God wants to strengthen us. When you and I, when we are weak and we feel defeated, we are to turn to God who has an inexhaustible supply of strength.

[31 : 34] And we need his strength. Paul says he is able to strengthen you according to my gospel. Now that might sound strange. Paul doesn't mean to suggest that this gospel was his, and that it came from him personally.

He didn't invent the good news. Paul's gospel was a faithful preaching and a teaching of what had been revealed to him by God, that centered on Jesus Christ.

And this gospel was the mystery or the secret that had been kept, but had now been made known to us through the apostle Paul by the divine revelation from God.

And the prophetic writings he refers to, or Paul mentions here, are the Old Testament scriptures.

And the gospel is not only the mystery that has been revealed, but it's also a prophecy, the prophecy that had been fulfilled.

What was prophesied beforehand and written in the Old Testament has been revealed and has been fulfilled in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Well, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only news which is truly good news and the basis for the strength that we receive from God.

[32 : 43] And Paul mentioned this in his doxology. It is God's will that this gospel would go to all nations so that people would hear it, they would respond to it, and ultimately they would be saved.

And God has commanded his people, the church, to carry this good news to everyone in the world so people will know of the hope. We looked at 1 Peter this morning that people would know of the true hope that is in Christ Jesus.

And then Paul comes to the main point of the doxology that God, the God who plans salvation in this way is all wise, that he deserves glory forevermore.

All that Paul had written, everything that had come to this point in Romans comes to this final point. Glory and honor to God forever and ever. Amen.

I don't think Romans could end in a more fitting way, that God would be the glory. We exist to praise him. We exist to serve him.

[33 : 45] We exist to worship him and to bring him glory. To God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Heavenly Father, as we close this morning with the final song, I just, Lord, I thank you for this book of Romans.

I thank you for this letter, Lord. I thank you for Paul, even the circumstances he was in when he wrote this, Lord. I thank you for the rich doctrine. Thank you for the instruction, Lord. I would pray, Lord, as your word says, that we would be watchful, Lord, that there are those that would come into our lives, into our church, that might speak things that are contrary to that which you've taught, Lord, to be hindrance, to be divisive, and that we would keep an eye out for that, Lord.

We do thank you for those that would be co-workers in that which you've called us to do, Lord. And ultimately, as Paul ends there, Lord, just we pray that you would be given praise and glory forever and ever because it is certainly due your name.

Lord, we thank you for this time this morning. We thank you for your word. We ask this in your son's name. Amen.