

Series: Romans	Reference: Romans 16:17-20	Title: Keep Watch	Date: 3.26.17
Website Writeup:			
False teaching, and throwing up walls to salvation - these are the problems and the things the Church has guarded against throughout history. It is not an easy task, how does the Church guard truth without throwing up more walls to salvation?			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

We've had a few weeks of this wonderful image of the early Roman church; growing in number & influence among the nations; things are going well. They've had outside pressures, but a common enemy unifies a community. But attack doesn't always come from the outside, sometimes it's from within. Personal conflicts might occur within a community, which is difficult at times.

However, sometimes the attack is subtle & even more devastating. You don't see it coming. Disguised with intellectualism & reason, it's not the personal attack on individual character, rather it's a quiet & slow eroding of doctrine which involves the whole church. Philosophic in nature, it's a seemingly inconsequential & unnoticed assault on truth which plays out over time. It seems logical. Well thought out. Sensible. An attack on the integrity of the Gospel message like slowly boiling a frog. As people forget to filter life through Scripture, the water heats up slowly until its too late. *It's this kind of attack Paul warns us of at the end of Romans...I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.*

At the end here, this letter reads like a father writing to his daughter in college, "Your grades are great, I'm so proud of you, but watch out for those randy frat brothers!"

Paul's argued in the past about the Judaizers (not the only ideology he combatted). Judaizers were those who demanded Gentile Christian converts to adopt the Mosaic Law in minute detail in order to 'be saved'. They're seen in Acts 15:5, when they said "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

Theirs was a self-righteousness, not a Christ-righteousness. They missed the point of the Law of God which was to teach the need for salvation. Instead they had set up a whole system of how to become righteous in the eyes of God & others. This of course produces a destructive spiritual pride, and an atmosphere of control & judgment. They wanted to add to the Gospel - it wasn't just about Jesus to them, *but it was Jesus AND; Jesus AND circumcision; Jesus AND obedience to the Law as a prerequisite for salvation.*

An errant teaching. Truth mixed with a lie, using Scripture to back it up. Destructive & undermining to the Gospel. Paul regards this as nothing less than satanic (v20). It's that important, since it deals with salvation & the glorification of Christ among the nations! It's so important Paul says...Keep away from them.

Just like when you were a child & your mom said, “Stay away from that Vinny Nicoletti kid...he’s trouble!” God says stay away from these people who twist the Gospel! Why? Because... ¹⁸*For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*

Now, Paul isn’t advocating for isolationism. He’s not telling Christians to bunker themselves into their Ivory Towers & stay separate from the world out there. He’s saying, “Those who claim to be Christians among you, but teach a message contrary to what the Church traditionally holds scripturally true...have nothing to do with them.” They’re poisonous leaven, working through the whole batch of dough.

Things such as the Prosperity Gospel we see today. Truth mixed with just enough lie, it all seems to make sense... “God wants you to be rich & healthy - only the best for you!” Sounds all good right...makes sense. The belief is that financial blessing & physical well-being are always the will of God, and that faith, positive speech, and tithing will increase one's material wealth.

At some level there’s some truth to it, but Prosperity Theology views the Bible as contractual between God & Humanity. If humans have faith, then God’s duty bound to deliver security & prosperity. And although there’s some truth in their message, as you watch Prosperity Gospel teachers such as Joel Osteen, Kenneth Hagin, Creflo Dollar, TD Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, and others, you realize something’s just not quite right...

Their theology negates suffering, and it’s a very new theological construction of only about 100 years (that’s a red flag). Although God promises wholeness & peace in the end, He never promised riches & health in the Scriptures for us now. As a matter of fact He says don’t be surprised & even rejoice when you suffer for His name!

The Prosperity Gospel spreads like wildfire in poor communities. If you’re poor, who wouldn't like that message? But it doesn’t hold up in Syria, or other places of persecution for the Christian. It falls apart there, or when people don’t get out of poverty, or when the Pastor doesn’t have a vacation home in Hawaii, and drive the most expensive car on the block - because for the theology to work, the pastor has to be the wealthiest man in the room, or why listen to him? The prosperity Gospel is all about our stomachs (desires), and dependent on our situation instead of rising above it. It’s nothing about Jesus. It’s contractual - it’s the Judaizer’s argument in different clothing - If I do *A*, then God owes me *B*. It puts God in debt to Humanity. It’s simply a lie. If those books are on your shelf...Paul would say throw ‘em out.

Paul’s not the only one to warn us. Jesus did as well, ¹⁵ *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*²¹ He also considered this to be serious, ⁶ *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung*

¹ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 7:15.

around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”² And in Titus 3 it says the same, ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.”³

Last week we spoke of our future hope, and how we also live in the interim time of tribulation for the Church. It’s important we remain steadfast in our devotion to the Scriptures. The Kingdom of God has already come, but not fully come. We want to live the gospel in maturity as we wait for its fulfillment. And in the waiting, our view of God doesn’t change based on ever-fluctuating cultural tides. God is supra-cultural, He rises above it. Likewise, the Church rises above culture in it’s interpretation of events, philosophies, and human nature, filtering it all through the Scriptures. It’s the anchor. **The church is to be in the world as a ship is on the ocean - sailing on the waves - but once the ship springs a leak & the ocean gets in, it sinks. False teaching is the rock we didn’t see under the waves.**

There are pillars the Gospel is set upon, two of which we can say very clearly are... [1] Sin & our need for Salvation, and [2] Christ’s gracious work on the Cross to satisfy that need. And we find that if the Gospel is preached without repentance from that sin, it won’t produce changed lives. If the Gospel is preached without a call to holiness in ongoing devotion, it will produce compromise. If the Gospel is preached without a call to serve as Christ models to us, we get complacency. **In Hebrews 7 it speaks of Jesus as being a “high priest [who] truly meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.”⁴ We’re called to emulate Him in our walk, from our worldview to beliefs, to values & to behavior.**

Faith’s a lifestyle. We can’t be faced with sudden tribulation in life, only then cracking our Bibles to get clarity. That’s immature Foxhole Faith. We invest daily, relying on tradition of the Church, since it’s not just knowledge we pursue, but wisdom. The ability to discern between truth & untruth, and apply the knowledge we obtain to life’s situations. And for that, we need a consistency & a unified voice.

God’s like the best love song ever written, never going out of style. His Word speaks to the human condition transcending all cultural mores. A song to which we can all relate, no matter our background, race, nationality, gender, or station in life - because it speaks to those things which are elemental to humanity; ontology, existence, love, sexuality, passion, etc...

² *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 18:6.

³ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Tt 3:10–11.

⁴ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 7:26.

We can't conform His Kingdom to our perceived reality, or what culture dictates. That's to put Humanity in the place of God. *One commentator said, God's Word stands as the only absolute. All else is measured by what God has stated as true.*⁵

We don't form God to our liking. Neither is faith an individualistic endeavor, it's lived out & informed by trusted brothers & sisters who've walked with God through the centuries: The Church in agreement. God's word isn't progressive & changing, since it speaks to the elementals of humanity. He may be progressing us to deeper understanding of Himself through it, but God doesn't change.

Therefore, we conform ourselves to Scriptures direction since it's our ultimate eternal reality; we're citizens of Heaven. This will all pass away & be recreated; new heavens & new earth. Worldly philosophies, values & beliefs will dissipate, but God's Word will last. Gods peace shall reign. So our future hope is an elemental part of our theology which we spoke of last week. This future mindset is reflected in Philippians 3 where, like here in Romans 16, Paul speaks of people preaching a contrarian message which seeks to satisfy their stomachs & is set on earthly things.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Paul advocates for imitation of the saints. Devotion to orthodox teaching as in Acts 2:42 - *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* All with an assurance, Christ will bring everything under his control, and we'll be transformed in glory! But as of now, some try to bend the kingdom of God to conform to their desires, to make it easier, more palatable maybe. They follow their stomachs, rather than enduring the tribulation in patience while trusting in God's Word now. They look at God & say, "Yeah, that's not gonna work for me."

We live in a time when Facebook has over 60 different terms for a person to identify their gender. Scripture has two - male & female. However, many try to conform the Word of God to fit these 60 plus different definitions of gender in an effort to redefine human sexuality. One scholar said it well, "You cannot read the Scriptures & come out with a positive view of sexuality outside of the heterosexual marriage covenant - it's just not there." Paul would say it's false teaching & divisive to do so, and have nothing to do with those who teach it.

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 278.

Scripture was written in a time of greater acceptance of these behaviors, more than we experience now. The back history of Greece is that Spartan women would shave their heads on their wedding day in order to help men transition from homosexual to heterosexual intercourse. The Roman emperor Claudius's romantic life was considered *atypical* because he only had sexual relations with women. Some wealthy Roman homes were built with special rooms for orgies with small windows cut out so others could enjoy the show - the ancient equivalent to internet pornography.

These arguments aren't new, and Scripture, penned during a time of almost complete acceptance of deviant sexual mores, called people to a conservative expression of sexuality. It didn't condone, rather against it. If God meant for us to accept different expressions of it, he wouldn't have called His people to a conservative sexual ethic - it would've been counterintuitive. To become a Christian at that time would affect not only your status as a citizen of Rome & the worship of its deity, Caesar, but also your sexuality. God was saying, "I created human sexuality as in the Garden of Eden, that's what I am calling all people to reflect." So, means the Church didn't start out as a bunch of stuck up conservatives which just need to learn their lesson that human sexuality is fluid. It means the early church was made up of people who most likely had been immersed in a very liberal sexual attitude & lifestyle; possibly practicing these things before they came to Christ - and that's why we see issues arise in the Corinthian church. It's most likely residual cultural practice with which they struggle.

Outside of the Prosperity Gospel the blurring or erasure of the lines of sin is probably the largest twisting of the Gospel message we see today. It must be preached on, sadly many don't. I wish I could just throw open my arms & be accepting of those who want to practice a different sexual expression, but I can't - I'm bound by Scripture. I can't allow what God says to be true, to be spoken of as evil as **Paul warned us back in chapter 14, ¹⁶ *Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.*** God's word is good; I can't agree it's evil, even if people disagree with scriptural convictions.

Sin has created a legitimate struggle in this area! Grace is needed for all of us - because we're all deviant to greater or lesser degrees! But, there's a big difference in someone sitting in church saying, "I'm allowed to live as I want in this area." As opposed to another saying, "I struggle with sexuality, but I am sacrificing it at the alter of Christ to conform my desires to His will as a testimony to Jesus."

Paul gives two instructions in whatever falsehoods we face: identify false teachers, and avoid them. It's not about being liberal or conservative, its about being obedient. We need to rise above nationality & culture, stop politicizing our faith, or jogging in step with our culture, and start following Jesus at the risk of losing friends!

Proverbs 6 tells us seven things which are detestable to God, the last of which is, ***a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*** Warren Wiersbe says this, ***The issue is not making or keeping friends, but pleasing the***

Lord and maintaining a consistent testimony. Romans 16:20 suggests that these false teachers really come from Satan, and one day even he shall be completely defeated.⁶

But it doesn't seem priority for us at times. Someone was telling me recently about a Jehovah's Witness friend who had applied for a teaching job at an evangelical organization. They were denied. And this person couldn't understand why, saying, "Aren't we all going in the same direction?" No, we're not! A Jehovah's Witness doesn't share Christian scriptural convictions! Teaching & truth are important & the Church needs to guard the integrity of its message. We're not all working towards the same thing. When a Church or Christian Organization seeks to conform themselves to the written Word of God they seek to glorify the name of Christ. When they seek to conform to culture, they seek to glorify humanity. There's a big difference.

I like what Timothy Keller said, *"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead."*

...Paul finishes for us today by saying...Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

This church had kept its full doctrinal & ethical integrity for which Paul rejoices! But the dangers are there, and he needs to warn them - watch out for the frat brothers sweetheart! Be wise concerning good, and innocent in evil. Jesus said the same in Mt 10:16, ¹⁶ *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.* There's no need to experience the mistakes of others. We don't have to smoke meth to know its devastative effects. We can see how alcoholism destroys lives - and we can see how false theology kills the true Gospel of Christ. God never intended us to become intimate with evil in order to communicate the gospel to others. To Timothy, Paul advised the opposite; *"Flee the evil desires of youth"* (2 Tim 2:22).⁷ Remain innocent in evil, keep away from its message. Don't fraternize with those who teach a false Gospel, they're ferocious wolves, warped & sinful, and self-condemned.

Satan was the first to bring division when he said, ⁵ *"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* [Gen 3:5] And Paul alludes back to Genesis 3:15 here where it says, ¹⁵ *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* Our hope lies in the fact that Christ has overcome Satan, and will finally destroy his influence altogether. As we stay vigilant together now awaiting the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom!

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 566.

⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 279.

Questions for Community Group Leaders

1. How do we practice Jesus AND... in our expression of faith? What *extra* requirements has the Church put on people as a requirement for faith & salvation?
2. How do we allow our 'stomachs' (which is a metaphor for our desires) to dictate our view of & belief in God?
3. How does it make you feel to be told to AVOID false teachers? Does that make you feel mean? Does it give you anxiety? What governs your emotions in this area? And how would you deal with them?
 1. What's the difference in avoiding a false teacher inside the church, as opposed to witnessing to a false teacher outside the church (non-Christian)?
 2. What is the difference? And why is the person within the church dangerous but the one outside not?
4. If sin & our need for Salvation, and Christ's gracious work on the Cross to satisfy that need are two pillar truths for humanity, then discuss what the following statements mean to us...
 1. If the Gospel is preached without repentance, it won't produce changed lives.
 2. If the Gospel is preached without a call to holiness, it will produce compromise.
 3. If the Gospel is preached without a call to serve, we get complacency.
5. How are we called to emulate Jesus in our walk, from our worldview to beliefs, to values, to behavior as He is described in Hebrews 7...a "*high priest [who] truly meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*"
6. In Romans 14:16 it says, *Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.*
 1. How have we done this?
 2. How do we reconcile our feelings about current issues the Church faces in society which may seem harsh from the Christian standpoint?
 3. How can we come to terms with an issue which stands in stark contrast to popular cultural belief and be convinced that God actually directs us in these ways for the good of humanity?
 4. How do we stand in these convictions graciously, and not in judgment of others? What is the difference in judging behavior, as opposed to judging a heart?
 5. What is your reaction to Warren Wiersbe's statement, *The issue is not making or keeping friends, but pleasing the Lord and maintaining a consistent testimony.*
7. PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: How does the Church guard Truth, without throwing up walls? Without becoming the Pharisaical Judaizer all over again?