

Series: Romans	Reference: Romans 16:25-27	Title: The End	Date: 4.2.17
Website Writeup:			
In this final message in Romans, we recap last weeks sermon well, and end on a reiteration of the fact that Paul's been establishing Truth for the Church at large, and in Rome, in order that they may own it, and bring the true Gospel to all nations; all people groups for the glory of Christ!! God is not dead, His Truth reigns for all peoples!			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

This is our last sermon in Romans. Some will be very happy about that, we've been in this for a while, and touched on some difficult topics. Every week I recap the week before & maybe none is more important than this week to do so. *Last week we heard Paul say, "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. Keep away from them"* We saw this sentiment repeated in Matthew 7:15, 18:6, Titus3:10-11, and Philippians 3:17-21.

As we stated, most pastors approach verses like this in obedience to preaching the whole counsel of Scripture. They're difficult verses, and for some of us these issues are more personal than the next. So in light of that, I thought it good to do a more thorough recap.

We heard Paul, and others, including Jesus, say last week that the Church needs to guard the integrity of its message; the Gospel. Keeping away from false teachers & divisive people. That's a hard thing to say, let alone put into practice! It doesn't feel like it fits with terms like grace & mercy.

Be aware, I know of no false teachers at Six:Eight. Paul was praising the Roman church for holding onto her integrity, just as I praise Six:Eight. But in pastoral care, he was warning them to be vigilant, since attacks will come from within - not just from without. They'll face some who'll say they are part of the faith community, but teach a different gospel. Six:Eight's kept the integrity of the Gospel, but we live in a time where very basic beliefs are being challenged & reinterpreted.

In 1966 Time Magazine asked, *Is God Dead?* In big red letters on a black background. It was reminiscent of Nietzsche's statement, God is Dead, which is found in a number of his writings, but particularly *The Gay Science (Joyous Wisdom)*. In the writing a man rushes into a market place looking for God, only to be made fun of since no one believes in God any longer. And the man then claims we've killed God. What Nietzsche is concerned with in writing this is that God is dead in the hearts of modern men - killed by rationalism & science. This same God, however, had provided the foundation of a Christian-moral defining & uniting approach to life as a shared cultural set of beliefs fully within which people had lived their lives. Also in 1961, Gabriel Vahanian, a Christian Theologian, published the book *The Death of God*. Vahanian argued that modern secular culture had lost all sense of the sacred, lacking any sacramental meaning, no transcendental purpose, or sense of providence. He concluded that for the modern mind "God is dead".

Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that the acceptance of the Death of God will also involve the ending of accepted standards of morality & purpose. Without the former & accepted faith based standards society is threatened by a nihilism where peoples lives are unconstrained by considerations of morality or guided by any sense of purpose.

Which leads to this months Time Magazine cover design which was exactly the same with only one difference. They exchanged the word God with Truth; *Is Truth Dead?* The article was about Donald Trump, however, long before that article came out, we've all felt we don't know who or what to trust any longer. Both are questions Americans have been asking themselves for a long time...Is God Dead? Is Truth Dead? Now more than ever, Humanity needs the Church to be solid in their communication of God, and their proclamation of Truth, giving room for people to explore all that.

Paul's not saying, people can't have fellowship while holding different views. If you remember we equated the church as being in the world as a ship is on the ocean. Let's add to that illustration - it's a rescue vessel, pulling people from the waves onto the dry deck who are drenched with worldly philosophy. We said last week, false teaching is the leak in the hull of the ship. Paul's not arguing against the person sitting on the deck of the ship dripping wet, having just been pulled from the waters & having honest discussion about Scripture, faith & belief, and even having very serious struggles with some of what the Scriptures say. That's working things out.

What he's arguing is the person who's been on deck for a while, and is actively & intentionally teaching a different gospel, or twisted gospel, which would lead people astray. In other words the guy who picks up the axe & starts to hack a hole in the hull of the ship.

I know some have struggles with some of what the Scriptures teach, and where the church falls in its interpretation of them. We're always growing in these things, but how God defines sin is a foundational Gospel issue. None of us are perfect in any of this. And none of us have an axe in our hand & are hacking away at the integrity of the hull which is our church, yet some of us need to go deeper in our understanding of Truth, and sacrifice the idol of our reputation on the altar of it.

There are many different philosophies or lines of thought which seek to infiltrate the Church which those tasked with governance & leadership need to guard against. Or, better said, need to guide Christians in guarding against. I chose two of the larger ones I see facing the Church in America these days; the Prosperity Gospel, and what I deemed last week as the erasure or blurring of the lines of sin. Very few seem to take offense at identifying the Prosperity Gospel as a problem. Perhaps because it's voices are usually people who embody a persona which is largely unpopular & unattractive in culture today - the TV evangelist. However, the Prosperity Gospel does infiltrate church at times.

The second issue, which I termed the erasure, or blurring of the lines of sin, does however bring up some very large fears for some, and which almost always translates to

offense and/or anger. Whenever we get scared, we usually react in anger - it's just our nature to do so. And when our desires, pleasures, or what we view as our core identities are questioned, it produces strong feeling. We are to wrestle with God on issues of Scriptural content. Taking the tension we feel back to the Scriptures, going to God & working it out with Him in the context of Christian fellowship.

The erasure, or blurring of the lines of sin is really an issue of Scriptural interpretation, or the reinterpretation of Scripture. An issue of hermeneutics; how we glean the meaning from the text we call God's Word.

Statements & documents are important. They help govern a body of people. I remember once when I was part of a mission board, I was arguing one of the leaders on a point. And he simply said to me, "Jason, that's not what this mission board holds to be true." It stopped me dead in my tracks, since I realized I wasn't just having an issue with this man, but with the whole organization, and I respected that. I couldn't hack a hole in the hull of the ship. And it made me to be able to have fellowship with him without feeling slighted.

Six:Eight's Statement of Faith, which we sign onto when becoming members of this church, states, *We believe that **THE BIBLE** in its entirety is God's word. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are divinely inspired, truthful, authoritative, and infallible in matters of faith and practice. [2 TIMOTHY 3:16, 2 PETER 1:20-21, 2 TIMOTHY 1:13, PSALMS 119:105, 160; 12:6, PROVERBS 30:5]*

In other words, we believe the Scriptures to be the divine word of God relayed to us through certain personalities like Paul; Truth. So when Paul speaks in Romans, we believe this is the inerrant Word of God to us in matters of faith & practice. Traditional interpretation is to seek to understand the text in its cultural context & time within which it was written, in light of all other Scripture, and taking into account what the original author meant to convey; in short, the author's intention in the midst of his context & how that applies to us now. Last week we said, God's Word's like a timeless love song transcending culture & time speaking to the foundational nature of humanity.

Traditional hermeneutic values a person like Paul believing him to be an intelligent man, well thought out, speaking with conviction & under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In other words the Holy Spirit speaking through the personality of Paul, or Luke, or whomever is writing. God uses human personalities in ministry. But suffice it to say, traditional orthodoxy dictates that when Paul speaks in Romans, God speaks.

So, in that, an important factor is understanding the *authors intent*. That has changed in many Christian circles today; the death of God, the death of truth. A new intellectualism has arisen in western culture driven by a philosophy of progressivism. The twentieth century was to be the century when the *West was to remove ignorance through education, science & technology & thus eradicate evil in the world*. Proponents of this humanistic trinity enthroned education, and saw the most basic problem in society as

ignorance, not sin. They thought, "If we can just get people to think right, they will live right." But the problem is without God's truth, what is right?

This new intellectualism & progressivism have infiltrated the church affecting our hermeneutic by saying, "*Well, the author could not have foreseen the issues we face today, he was an ancient & limited in his understanding, therefore we need to have a new hermeneutic.*" In other words, the evolution of thought, where we wrongly believe we are smarter now, and have to have a new way to interpret the Scriptures.

In this new hermeneutic the intent of the *interpreter* becomes most important & not the *author*, since the author is viewed as living in a backwards less developed time - 'the evolution of intelligence' way of looking at Scripture. In other words we grow, develop & progress past old traditional mores & onto new ways of interpreting Scripture as believers. So the *interpreters*, not the *authors* intent is the ruling factor in some Christian circles today. Which makes the Bible just another document in which its meaning is evolving as culture 'progresses'. Therefore, some think that if we reverted to the writers' understanding, then we would be *regressing*, instead of *progressing!* And they're forced to read into the text what they desire instead of interpreting the text for its true meaning. But the more honest of them will simply throw parts out since they know it doesn't fit their purposes. Or in the very least, divine inspiration goes right out the window, since to view the Scriptures through this light, it can't be divinely inspired unless God is nothing more than a carbon copy of us. However, the Orthodox Church has & never will view the Scriptures in that light.

The Protestant Reformation (16th century) was helpful in giving an appreciation of Scripture as a direct, straightforward message from God written on a 3rd grade level. The Reformers laid emphasis on the study of Hebrew & Greek grammar and of ancient Near Eastern history as the most appropriate tools for understanding the Bible. Yet they also insisted that the Bible was "perspicuous" (from Latin for "transparent"). That is, the meaning of Scripture is clear to any intelligent reader who reads it the way one would read an ordinary human document—if that person is humble enough to ask the Holy Spirit for understanding of the inspired Word of God. Which is the way Christians should approach the task of biblical interpretation.¹ The new gnosticism says to us that only the really smart people can rightly interpret scripture since the rest of us are just dolts and can't understand.

So, when Six:Eight uses the term Scripture we mean God's inspired Word conveyed through certain people which is as it states in **2 Peter 1:20-21**: *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit utilizing humans as the vehicle of communicating God's Word;*

¹ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, "Bible, Interpretation of The," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 309.

Scripture/the Bible. Scripture is revealed, which is a hugely important point for us to grasp.

Or in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* The Scriptures revealed, God-breathed, as a guide in all areas of life & even in correction of faulty thinking or behavior.

However, when someone else uses the term Scripture, they may mean something totally different, regarding it merely as an ancient document, maybe telling us something of God, but not authoritatively, given that it's up for reinterpretation due to the 'progression of society & humankind'.

This is extremely dangerous, since the Scriptures cease to be God's Word at that moment, since this thinking puts authority in the hands of Humankind, not God. It opens up a can of worms - now we can redefine Scripture, the meaning of sin, salvation & anything else. **It's the recommittal of the original sin of Adam & Eve, when, by listening to the lies of Satan, they ate the apple, and by doing so they were saying, "I can choose how I deem best to live. I choose what is right or wrong. I choose what I desire."** That's why Paul invokes such strong language of avoidance, and even identifies these messages as coming from Satan in v20. It's why Philippians 3 & Titus 3 are worded so strongly, and even Jesus warns in a very dire manner about this issue as we looked at last week.

One of the best comparisons I can make [*and we know any illustration breaks down at some level*] is to the Constitution of America. The Constitution for America can be compared to the Apodictic Law of the Old Testament for Christians as found in the Ten Commandments. They're the moral & ethical ground of which all other case laws were built on & compared to in ancient Israel. So, the Constitution is the standard by which case laws are compared to & decided in light of for our courts. If a case oversteps the bounds of the Constitution, it's deemed 'unconstitutional' and thrown out. Judges could be equated to pastors or theologians who interpret Old Testament Casuistic Law in light of Apodictic law. A judges task concerning American Jurisprudence is to keep decisions in line with the guiding principles of the Constitution. Constitution is king, it rules. It's considered a sacred document.

If you get a judge who doesn't value the Constitution, with an attitude that the founding fathers were limited in their understanding, that society has progressed & therefore, their interpretation was, or is now faulty in this more intelligent modern context, suddenly all authority has switched to that Judge instead of the Constitution. The interpreter becomes king, not the author. And he or she then is free to make decisions which are of a contradictory nature to the traditional views of the Constitution. They are no longer bound to the Constitution. Now, all good illustrations break down, the Constitution isn't the Divinely Inspired Word of God, but the comparison is helpful in understanding the issues we face in church, since we all hold the Constitution so highly -

probably second to the Scriptures in life for most Americans. It's regarded as almost a sacred document.

Right now there are voices out there which listen to the culture concluding that the Scriptures are up for reinterpretation in light of what they would say is the fact that we have progressed past people like Paul & other authors of Scripture. They're like the judge who does not view the Constitution as authoritative any longer. This is seen in the area of reinterpretation of sin; either the complete erasure in some cases, or the blurring of the lines in others. It's like playing a game where everyone gets to make up the rules along the way - just doesn't work.

And like we said last week, if the Gospel is preached without repentance to what God has deemed as sin, it won't produce changed lives. If the Gospel is preached without a call to holiness, it will produce compromise. And if the Gospel is preached without a call to service, it becomes complacent. Which makes this thinking a false gospel to guard against - since in this thinking the interpreter gets to decide for themselves how they shall live, just like Adam & Eve, they get to define sin, not God.

So again, let me reiterate. Paul's speaking of people who are intentionally preaching a message contrary to the Gospel in an effort to draw people away & in line with their thinking; they should be avoided. He's not speaking to the person in a faith community who is legitimately wrestling with the Scriptures & their message, and have just not had the time to come to terms with some of those things; the respectful person who isn't upsetting the ship, but is just asking questions & exploring faith.

It's been said that a preacher has to preach with the Bible in one hand & a newspaper in the other. Which I take to mean that we take what God's Word says to us in it's context & apply it to our current situation. And sometimes that means a difficult conversation for many of us, which I think everyone can appreciate....and with all that being said, Paul brings us to a close this week, and to our series...

*²⁵Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the **revelation** of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶but now **revealed** and **made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God**, so that **all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith**— ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Notice, Paul even reiterates this point, the prophetic writings revealed by the command of the eternal God. For what reason? For the same reason he's been speaking of all throughout Romans - that the Gentile Nations might know & worship God! That they too might come to obedience which comes from faith to the leading of God's Word & His Holy Spirit! That He's calling all people groups out of their lostness, out of the waters & onto the deck of the ship which is the Church. That God is not dead, and his Truth reigns.

This closing benediction is the longest Paul ever wrote. It reflects his special ministry to the Gentiles. “The mystery” has to do with God’s program of uniting believing Jews & Gentiles in one body, the Church.

We see this fleshed out in Ephesians 3 where he says, “*Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, **the mystery made known to me by revelation**, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to people in other generations as **it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets**. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel **the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel**, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”*

Again, here we see the idea that God’s Word is revealed through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles & Prophets. Not made up, or just coming out of a certain context & therefore changes over time. Not a human construction, but rather divinely inspired word. God’s eternal truth revealed through the vehicle of chosen people.

And this was Paul’s special message - that all Gentile nations are called into relationship with God. It was because of this message that the Judaizers persecuted Paul, because they wanted to maintain Jewish privileges. Both Jews & Gentiles in the Roman churches needed to know what God’s program was. Some of which Paul explained in 9–11.

Christians are established by the truth, which explains why Paul wrote this letter: to explain God’s plan of salvation to Christians so they would be established, and so they would share the truth with the all nations/all people groups. After all, we can’t really share with others something we don’t believe ourselves. So truth & gospel understanding are important! Our own study of Romans should make us more stable in faith, and more excited to share Christ. With the end result being glory to God through Jesus Christ forever!² So, how do we submit our whole selves as it commands in Romans 12:1-2 allowing ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds?

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 566.

Questions for Community Group Leaders

1. Open by asking the Holy Spirit to lead in truth.
2. There are two basic steps in interpretation. One must ask: (1) What did the passage mean for the person who first spoke these words or wrote them and for the people who first heard or read them? (2) What should the passage mean to a reader today? The first task is to enter into the circumstances of the person who first wrote or heard or read the passage and then try to understand the meaning in the light of the whole Bible. The second is to try to make the meaning of the passage clear in the circumstances of the present century. Interpreters in every age have struggled to be faithful in these two steps.
 1. Is this the way you approach the Scriptures in your study of it?
 2. Do you have consistent quiet times? Wrestling with God & sacrificing your desires to what God deems as true for all of humanity?
 3. Is the authors intent your first concern, or are you reading into Scripture what you want it to say?
3. How do you see the *Death of God Movement* progressing in our society?
 1. Do you feel backwards or unintelligent as a Christian in light of the changing culture & hostility to what God says is true in America right now?
 2. How can you sacrifice your reputation on the altar of Truth & follow God well in this current cultural climate - how can you hold onto Truth, but not come off as an unintelligent jerk?
4. Read Romans 12:1-2...
 1. What does it mean to be on a journey of faith where you are submitting your whole self - allowing yourself to be transformed by the renewing of your mind? Even when 'renewing your mind' may be viewed as *regressing* instead of *progressing*?
5. I have included the Nietzsche quote with some explanation below if you would like to read and think through it together.

Friedrich Nietzsche

God is dead quote

Friedrich Nietzsche is notable for having declared that God is dead and for having written several of his works in the presumption that man must find a new mode of being given the demise of God. Perhaps the most interesting quote on this theme appears in his *The Gay Science* (aka Joyous Wisdom). A fairly full version of this key quote is set out immediately below:



Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market-place, and cried incessantly: "I am looking for God! I am looking for God!"

As many of those who did not believe in God were standing together there, he excited considerable laughter. Have you lost him, then? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they shouted and laughed. The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

*"Where has God gone?" he cried. "I shall tell you. **We have killed him - you and I.** We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not more and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whosoever shall be born after us - for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto."*

*Here the madman fell silent and again regarded his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time has not come yet. The tremendous event is still on its way, still traveling - it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the distant stars - **and yet they have done it themselves.**"*

It has been further related that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang a requiem. Led out and quietened, he is said to have retorted each time: "what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?"



What Nietzsche is concerned at in relating the above is that God is dead in the hearts of modern men - killed by rationalism and science. This same God however, before becoming dead in men's hearts and minds, had provided the foundation of a "Christian-moral" defining and uniting approach to life as a shared cultural set of belief fully within which people had lived their lives.

Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that the acceptance of the Death of God will also involve the ending of accepted standards of morality and of purpose. Without the former and accepted faith based standards society is threatened by a nihilistic situation where peoples lives are not particularly constrained by considerations of morality or particularly guided by any faith related sense of purpose.