

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: Watch Out!

SCRIPTURE: Romans 16:17-23

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Whatever you find beautiful, glorious, and good, you will fight for purity when it comes to that thing. If you find food to be glorious, you're not going to eat at Taco Bell on a weekly basis. Instead, you're going to go to local, non-chain restaurants, and rave about them to your friends when you find something good. If you're passionate about sports, you're not going to tolerate performance-enhancing drugs or bandwagon fans. Why? Because these kinds of things pollute the purity of sport. If you esteem marriage to be a holy and good gift, you will seek to preserve its honor, and you'll talk about how things like adultery, divorce, and sex before marriage all poison the well of this God-given union. Again, that which you find to be glorious and good, you will likewise treasure the purity of that thing. In fact, you can't believe that something is wonderful, and then not care if people defile it. And this is the exact approach that Paul takes towards the gospel in Romans 16:17-20.

Paul loves the gospel. It's beautiful to him. It's glorious, good news. And he knows that his friends in Rome think about the gospel similarly. But what should the church at Rome do if the beauty and purity of the gospel is under attack? How should they respond if the gospel begins to be polluted or diluted in their midst?

Paul warns his friends that there are those who create divisions among God's people, and that these "persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites" (16:18). Because of this, Paul says these people should be avoided. The church in Rome should not follow their way, or give their teaching the time of day. But this is harder than it may seem because these false teachers are articulate and they use "smooth talk and flattery" (16:18). They don't draw a hearing by being mean. They are great-sounding, winsome, charismatic personalities that are out to deceive and divide God's people. What should the church at Rome do to protect themselves and pursue the purity of the gospel?

Well, in the middle of verse 19, Paul alludes to a saying of Jesus: “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves (i.e. false teachers), so be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). For both Paul and Jesus, wisdom means thoughtfully, patiently, and practically considering how to take that which is good and embody it. Further, innocence means that, after critically and humbly considering and engaging, if something is found to be against the good teaching, steer clear of it. Like the Bereans who examined the Scriptures to make sure that Paul was teaching the truth (Acts 17:11), we should examine everything next to the clarity of Scripture and the clarity of the gospel.

In order to preserve the purity of the gospel, we should start to ask questions like: Does that teacher or that idea make me think more about health, wealth, and results OR faith, hope, and love in relationship with Jesus? Does their teaching make me dwell more on what I can achieve if I only believe, OR what has been achieved by Jesus at the cross to save me? Do they focus more on experience, feelings, and personal potential, OR on the grace and peace that we share because of Jesus? Asking Jesus-centered questions like these will help us recognize false teaching.

Lastly, we should protect the purity of the gospel is by delighting in it. We will guard it well, if our protection of it comes from our prizing of it. We should love the gospel, trust the gospel, understand the gospel, explain the gospel, sing the gospel, and talk about the gospel; and in doing all of these things we combat any anti-gospel teaching that doesn't serve Christ.

For Discussion —

1. Why is a bit frightening that the false teachers Paul warns against are described as smooth-talkers?
2. Who is someone that you know who rightly embodies what these verses are talking about? Someone who loves the gospel so much that they protect its purity by defending it?
3. Who are possible false teachers today, and why?
4. How does ongoing obedience to Jesus relate to the false teachers that Paul mentions?
5. Personally, what stood out to you the most about this message?
6. How can we be comforted in knowing that we aren't believing a deceptive message?
7. What does it look like to focus on “the real thing,” and delight in the gospel as a means of combating false teaching?