



Title: Guarding the Gates

Subtitle: Shattering the Illusion of Theological Tolerance to Protect the Flock

Text: Romans 16:17-20

Companion Scriptures: Genesis 3:14-15; Ephesians 4:11-14; Ephesians 6:11-17

Main Idea: For the protection of the flock, believers are called to participate in God's serpent-crushing promise by holding fast to and living out the truth.

The Main Idea

For the protection of the flock, believers are called to participate in God's serpent-crushing promise by holding fast to and living out the truth.

- I. Keep an unrelenting watch for the traps
- II. Stand guard against the enemy's lure
- III. Fortify obedience with battle-ready discernment
- IV. Step into the serpent-crushing promise

Main Idea: For the protection of the flock, believers are called to participate in God's serpent-crushing promise by holding fast to and living out the truth.

Here is how we hold the line.

- I. Hold Fast by Keeping an Unrelenting Watch for the Traps (Romans 16:17)
- II. Protect the Flock by Standing Guard Against the Enemy's Lure (Romans 16:18 & Ephesians 4 & 6)
- III. Fortify Your Obedience with Battle-Ready Discernment (Romans 16:19)
- IV. Step Into the Serpent-Crushing Promise (Romans 16:20 & Genesis 3:14-15)

The Tragedy of the Unguarded Gate

Introduction

The greatest tragedy in human history happened because a gate was left unguarded.

- Adam was placed in Eden to work it and to keep it — to guard it. When the enemy arrived speaking smooth words, the watchman failed.
- He tolerated the serpent's theological twisting, failed to protect his flock, and humanity was plunged into ruin.
- Our culture calls tolerance the highest virtue. But in the ancient world an open gate during wartime was not tolerance — it was a guarantee of destruction.

Introduction: The Tragedy of the Unguarded Gate

The greatest tragedy in human history happened because a gate was left unguarded.

Take your minds back to the Garden of Eden. Adam was placed there to work it and to keep it—to guard it. But when the enemy arrived at the gates, speaking with smooth, reasonable-sounding words, the watchman failed. Adam did not guard the gate. He tolerated the serpent's theological twisting, he failed to protect his flock—his wife, Eve—and humanity was plunged into ruin.

In our modern culture, the highest possible virtue is "tolerance." We are told that an open mind is always a good thing. But brothers and sisters, in the ancient world, an open gate during wartime wasn't a sign of tolerance; it was a guarantee of destruction.

Why Paul's Tone Violently Shifts

Romans 16:1-16 → 16:17

- For sixteen verses Paul is bursting with affection, greeting twenty-six people by name in Rome.
- In verse 17 the tone turns. It is as if he signs off, remembers a lethal threat, and grabs the parchment back for one final, urgent command.
- He shifts because a shepherd who loves the sheep must also hate the wolf.

The enemy is still speaking smooth words, trying to breach the gates of the local church — but God has given us a battle plan.

Here is how we hold the line.

This brings us to Romans 16. For the first sixteen verses of this chapter, the Apostle Paul is bursting with affection. He lists twenty-six names, sending warm, pastoral greetings to the church in Rome. But then, in verse 17, his tone violently shifts. It is as if he is holding the pen to sign off, suddenly remembers a lethal threat, and grabs the parchment back to issue one final, urgent command. He shifts because a shepherd who loves the sheep must also hate the wolf.

The enemy is still speaking smooth words, trying to breach the gates of the local church. But God has given us a battle plan. For the protection of the flock, believers are called to participate in God's serpent-crushing promise by holding fast to and living out the truth.

Here is how we hold the line.

POINT I · ROMANS 16:17

Hold Fast by Keeping an Unrelenting Watch for the Traps

I. Hold Fast by Keeping an Unrelenting Watch for the Traps (Romans 16:17)

Paul begins with a severe imperative: "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them."

Scrutinize the Gates, Anchor the Unity

Romans 16:17

"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them."

skopein [skop-AY-in]

"Watch out" — the root of scope and telescope. A present infinitive: continuous, unrelenting focus. You don't glance at the gates once a week; you fix your sights on them.

didachen [dee-dakh-AYN]

The established apostolic doctrine. True unity is anchored in objective truth — the false teacher who introduces contrary doctrine fractures the church, not the believer defending it.

A. Maintain an Unrelenting Scrutiny of the Gates. The Greek word Paul uses for "watch out" is skopein [skop-AY-in]. It is where we get the English words "scope" or "telescope." Grammatically, it is a present infinitive, meaning it requires continuous, unrelenting focus. You don't just glance at the gates once a week; you fix your sights on them. You scrutinize the teachings entering the church.

B. Anchor True Unity in Apostolic Doctrine. Notice what actually causes division. Our culture says that the people who draw hard doctrinal lines are the divisive ones. But Paul says the exact opposite. True unity is anchored in the didachēn [dee-dakh-AYN]—the established, apostolic doctrine you have been taught. It is the false teacher introducing contrary doctrine who fractures the church, not the believer defending the truth.

True Unity Requires Objective Truth

"It is indeed a great evil to see the church rent asunder; but it is better that we should be separated from all men, than that we should be separated from the truth of God."

John Calvin, 16th-century Genevan Reformer — commentary on Romans 16

Our culture says those who draw hard doctrinal lines are the divisive ones. Paul says the exact opposite.

As the great 16th-century Genevan Reformer John Calvin famously wrote in his commentary on this very passage, "It is indeed a great evil to see the church rent asunder; but it is better that we should be separated from all men, than that we should be separated from the truth of God." True unity requires objective truth.

The Traps Are Baited on Purpose

skandalon [SKAN-dal-on]

Romans 14 — the accidental stumbling block

In last month's study (August 9), a believer could become a skandalon by carelessly exercising Christian liberty in front of a weaker brother. Unintentional.

Romans 16 — the deliberate snare

Here the word carries its original meaning: the trigger-stick of a snare, the bait mechanism of a deadly trap. False teachers lay these traps inside the church on purpose, to destroy the flock.

Keep an unrelenting watch · identify the traps · completely avoid them

C. Identify the Intentional, Baited Traps. Paul warns that these teachers create "obstacles." In the Greek, that word is skandalon [SKAN-dal-on]. Think back to the sermon we went through last month, on August 9th, from Romans 14. We looked at how a believer might accidentally become a skandalon—a stumbling block—to a weaker brother by carelessly exercising their Christian liberty.

But here in chapter 16, the skandalon is no accident. The original meaning of the word is the trigger-stick of a snare, or the bait mechanism in a deadly trap. These false teachers are intentionally laying traps inside the church to spiritually destroy the flock. Paul says we must keep an unrelenting watch, identify the traps, and completely avoid them.

POINT II · ROMANS 16:18; EPHESIANS 4 & 6

Protect the Flock by Standing Guard Against the Enemy's Lure

II. Protect the Flock by Standing Guard Against the Enemy's Lure (Romans 16:18 & Ephesians 4 & 6)

How does the enemy draw people into these traps? Verse 18 tells us: "For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."

The Enticement of Smooth Talk

Romans 16:18

"For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."

- False teachers never arrive wearing a name tag that says "Heretic." They use chrestologias — smooth, plausible speech — and eulogias, flattery and fine words.
- Coyotes don't charge the yard. They send one or two to the tree line to yip and agitate until the guard dog leaves the safety of the yard — then the pack surrounds it.
- A wise guard dog holds its ground and refuses to be drawn out.
- Thomas Schreiner notes the deliberate echo of Eden: the serpent used no battering ram, only the smooth question, "Did God really say?"

A. Recognize the Enticement of Smooth Talk. False teachers never arrive wearing a name tag that says "Heretic." They use chrēstologias [khray-stol-og-EE-as] (smooth, plausible speech) and eulogias [yoo-log-EE-as] (flattery and fine words).

Think about how a pack of coyotes operates in the woods. When they want to take down a guard dog, the whole pack doesn't charge the yard. They send one or two to the edge of the property to yip, play, or act irritating. They use enticement. They want to agitate the dog just enough to draw it out of the safety of the yard and into the tree line. The moment that dog crosses into the woods, the rest of the pack surrounds it.

That is what false teachers do. They use smooth talk to lure you outside the safety of biblical truth. A wise guard dog doesn't run into the woods to fight; it holds its ground in the yard and refuses to be drawn out.

New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner points out a brilliant connection

here: it is no accident that Paul says they use "smooth talk." He is pointing our minds all the way back to the Garden of Eden. How did the serpent breach the gates? He didn't use a battering ram; he used the smooth, flattering question, "Did God really say?" The false teachers are speaking with the tongue of the serpent.

The Fully Armored Watchman

Ephesians 4:14; 6:11-17

- Paul warns against being blown about by "human cunning" — kybeia, literally dice-playing: a gambler with loaded dice.
- The con artist creeps to the gate looking for an easy mark and instead finds a battle-hardened watchman in full armor: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, sword of the Spirit.
- Sound theology doesn't only protect you — it makes you a terrifying target to the enemy.



B. Strike Terror in the Enemy as a Fully Armored Watchman. If we look over at Ephesians 4:14, Paul warns the church not to be blown about by "human cunning." The Greek word there is kybeia [koo-BI-ah], which literally translates to "dice-playing." It refers to a gambler using loaded dice.

But how do we repel this rigged game? Just two chapters later in Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to stand in the full armor of God.

Picture the scene: a theological con artist creeps up to the gates of the church, playing his loaded dice, looking for an easy mark. But what does he see? He doesn't find a naive child. He finds a fierce, battle-hardened watchman standing in full armor. He sees the heavy belt of truth, the imposing breastplate of righteousness, the massive shield of faith, and the gleaming sword of the Spirit. When a wolf or a warring gambler sees that level of formidable protection, their heart drops. The very sight of a local church completely strapped in the heavy armor of sound biblical doctrine

evokes terror in the hearts of the enemy! Sound theology doesn't just protect you—it makes you a terrifying target to the enemy.

Their Motives, and Who Pays for Them

Romans 16:18; Ephesians 4

koilia [koy-LEE-ah]

They claim to serve Christ, but Paul exposes their true god: their own bellies. Like the coyote pack, the goal is to consume — platform, power, book sales, the applause of the culture.

akakon [ak-AK-ohn]

The naive and unsuspecting — what Ephesians 4 calls spiritual children. They are the ones lured past the tree line.

Our charge

Wear the armor and fiercely wield the Sword of the Spirit, cutting down lies with sound doctrine to carve out a perimeter of safety for the vulnerable in our church family.

C. Acknowledge Their Lethal, Self-Serving Motives. They claim to serve Christ, but Paul exposes their true god: their koilia [koy-LEE-ah], their own bellies. Like the coyote pack, their goal is to consume. They are driven by base appetites—platform, power, book sales, or the applause of the culture.

D. Secure the Naive by Fiercely Wielding Biblical Truth. Who falls for this lure? Paul says they deceive the akakōn [ak-AK-ohn]—the naive, the unsuspecting. Ephesians 4 calls them spiritual children. Our job as armored watchmen isn't just to wear the armor; it is to fiercely wield the Sword of the Spirit—the truth of the Bible. By unapologetically cutting down the enemy's lies with sound doctrine, we carve out a perimeter of absolute safety for the vulnerable in our church family. We use the fierce truth of God's Word to keep the naive securely within the gates, preventing them from ever wandering past the tree line into the teeth of the enemy.

POINT III · ROMANS 16:19

Fortify Your Obedience with Battle-Ready Discernment

III. Fortify Your Obedience with Battle-Ready Discernment (Romans 16:19)

So, how do we maintain this fierce, armed posture? Verse 19 says: "For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."

A Disciplined Garrison, an Unmixed Blade

Romans 16:19

"For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."

- Their obedience is famous. Like a Roman legion marching with shields locked, a reputation for discipline terrified enemies before a sword was drawn — but reputation alone won't survive an ambush.
- Be sophous (wise) as to good, and akeraious as to evil. Most Bibles render it "innocent"; the literal sense is unmixed, without alloy — the word used of pure metals.
- Mix pure iron with cheap metal and the sword gleams on the parade ground, then shatters the moment it strikes a shield. A mixed theology is a defective weapon.
- Do not blend the pure truth of God's Word with the smooth-talking philosophies of the culture.

A. Project the Imposing Reputation of a Disciplined Garrison. Paul says their obedience is famous! Think about a 1st-century Roman legion marching in perfect unison, shields locked. Their reputation for absolute discipline was "known to all," and it terrified their enemies before a sword was even drawn. Paul rejoices over this church because their reputation as a fully-armed, obedient garrison precedes them. But a great reputation alone won't survive an ambush. You must stay sharply vigilant.

B. Refuse to Wield the Defective Weapons of a Mixed Theology. To survive the enemy's traps, Paul says you must be sophous [sof-OOS] (wise) to what is good, and akeraious [ak-er-AH-yoos] to what is evil.

Most English Bibles translate akeraious as "innocent." But the literal Greek meaning is "unmixed" or "without alloy." It was the exact word used for pure metals.

Think about a soldier's sword. If a blacksmith tries to save money by

mixing pure iron with cheap, inferior metals, he creates an alloy. That sword might look gleaming and formidable on the parade ground, but the moment it strikes an enemy's shield in the heat of combat, that defective, mixed weapon will shatter in his hands.

Paul is warning the church: Do not mix the pure truth of God's Word with the cheap, smooth-talking philosophies of the culture! A mixed theology is a defective weapon. You must remain completely unmixed, holding to the pure *didachēn*, so that when the battle comes, your blade doesn't break.

Get Into the Armory

Romans 16:19

- A soldier doesn't scavenge the enemy's cheap weapons, and he doesn't leave half his armor back at camp. He carries only what his Commander issued — and all of it.
- He spots a counterfeit order not by studying every forgery, but by knowing the authentic seal and voice of his Commander so well that a discrepancy is felt immediately.
- You do not have time to read every heretical book or hunt down every compromising podcaster. Equip yourself from the armory of God's Word — and nowhere else.

Launching: an 8-week Sunday School course on the Literal-Grammatical-Historical method of studying the Bible.

C. Wield Only and All the Weapons from the Armory of Truth. A soldier doesn't scavenge the battlefield for the enemy's cheap weapons, nor does he leave half his armor back at camp. He wields only what his Commander has issued, and he puts on all of it.

How does a soldier know the difference between the Commander's genuine equipment and a forged, counterfeit combat order? He doesn't spend his time studying every possible forgery. He studies the authentic seal and voice of his Commander. Because he knows the genuine truth so intimately, the moment a forged, counterfeit order crosses his hands, he feels the discrepancy immediately.

Brothers and sisters, we are at war, and you do not have time to scavenge through every heretical book or hunt down every compromising podcaster. You must equip yourself from the armory of God's Word—and nowhere else. This is exactly why we are launching our 8-week Sunday School course on the Literal-Grammatical-Historical method of studying the Bible!

We want to get you into the armory. We want to equip you to wield only and all the genuine weapons of Scripture so well that a counterfeit lure snaps like a trap the moment you hear it.

POINT IV · ROMANS 16:20; GENESIS 3:14-15

Step Into the Serpent-Crushing Promise

IV. Step Into the Serpent-Crushing Promise (Romans 16:20 & Genesis 3:14-15)

When a church takes this stark, defensive stand, holding the line can feel exhausting. But look at the staggering promise in verse 20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

Crushed Under Your Feet

Romans 16:20

- True peace is never achieved by compromising with the enemy. God is a warrior who violently subdues the author of chaos.
- Genesis 3:15 — the Protoevangelium, the first promise of the Gospel: the Seed of the Woman would crush the serpent's head. Jesus accomplished it at the cross. The fatal blow has been struck.
- Yet Paul says syntripsei — shatter, trample — under your feet. United with Christ, His victory becomes yours.



A. Trust in the Warrior God of Peace. We call Him the God of peace, but true peace is never achieved by compromising with the enemy. As the renowned 20th-century theologian John Murray wrote, "The peace of God is not established by ignoring the enemy, but by his absolute subjugation." True peace in the church is achieved because God is a warrior who violently crushes the author of chaos.

B. Rest in Christ's Fatal Blow to the Enemy. Paul is taking us all the way back to the gates of Eden in Genesis 3:15, to the Protoevangelium—the very first promise of the Gospel. God looked at the serpent and promised that the Seed of the Woman would one day crush his head. Jesus Christ accomplished this on the cross. The fatal blow has been struck.

C. Stand Firm to Share in the Serpent's Crushing. But catch the shocking phrase in verse 20: God will crush Satan (syntripsei [soon-TRIP-say]—shatter, trample) under your feet.

Peace Through Subjugation, Not Compromise

"The peace of God is not established by ignoring the enemy, but by his absolute subjugation."

John Murray, 20th-century theologian

When you — the local church here in Glassboro — hold fast to the truth and refuse to be drawn into the woods by smooth-talking intruders, you are actively participating in the bruising of the serpent's head.

How is that possible? Christ defeated the enemy, but because you are united with Christ, His victory becomes your victory! When you—the local church here in Glassboro—hold fast to the truth, when you stand as imposing soldiers refusing to be drawn into the woods by smooth-talking intruders, you are actively participating in the bruising of the serpent's head.

Fighting From Victory

Conclusion

- We guard the gates — but not out of mean-spirited legalism, and not on a paranoid hunt for heretics.
- We do not fight for victory; we fight from victory.
- This week, audit your inputs: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Scrutinize the teachers, podcasts, and books you consume.
- Are the voices you listen to keeping an unrelenting watch for apostolic truth, or playing with loaded dice to earn the culture's applause?

"The most dangerous man in the Church is not the one who denies everything, but the one who denies one or two things and retains the rest."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, British preacher

Conclusion: Fighting from Victory

Brothers and sisters, we guard the gates. But we do not guard them out of mean-spirited legalism, and we don't go on a paranoid hunt for heretics. We stand our ground. We do not fight for victory; we fight from victory.

This week, audit your inputs. Take up the command the Apostle Paul gave to the Thessalonian church: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Scrutinize the teachers, the podcasts, and the books you consume. Remember the sobering warning of the great British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "The most dangerous man in the Church is not the one who denies everything, but the one who denies one or two things and retains the rest."

Are the voices you listen to keeping an unrelenting watch for the apostolic truth, or are they playing with loaded dice to earn the culture's applause?

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Leave the ranks of the naive. Get into the armory of the Word.

When we hold fast to the truth, we aren't just defending a building. We are protecting the flock, and stepping into the serpent-crushing promise of our King.

Leave the ranks of the naive. Get into the armory of the Word.

Because when we hold fast to the truth, we aren't just defending a building. We are protecting the flock, and we are stepping into the glorious, serpent-crushing promise of our King.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."