

THE PROS AND CONS OF MINISTRY

STUDY TWO

Boars in God's Vineyard

Romans 16:17–20

Be aware. As a shepherd, keep your eyes open. Pay attention to those who are influencing others in the church. Those who do so with wrong motives will soon reveal themselves as among those boars in the vineyard.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

No church is free of problem-people. The wealthy congregant whose giving fluctuates based on how much she enjoyed the past few sermons. The stubborn elder who foments strife among his fellow elders. The nosy gossip who shares others' private information without hesitation.

These problem-people are like boars in God's vineyard. They root around looking to attack laborers for the gospel. As a result, they uproot the kingdom-work that congregants have spent years cultivating, causing that local church to have little fruit to show for all its faithful work.

Yes, the problematic behavior of a few can cause a great deal of damage for many—especially in Christian communities. This *Searching the Scriptures* study offers ways to identify these boars and ways to respond to them so God's vineyard might be restored to a state of flourishing.



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Romans 16:17–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before His death, Jesus told His disciples, “I will build my church” ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Human effort alone will not cause God’s vineyard to flourish. Instead, ministers of the gospel must rely on the Heavenly Gardener. Offer this prayer of dependence to Him as you open His Word today:

Father, I acknowledge that I will accomplish nothing apart from You. Give me wisdom today as I seek to understand how to handle problem-people in Your church. Help me rely on Your guiding hand as I work in Your vineyard. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Many consider Paul’s letter to the Romans to be His *magnum opus*. Throughout the letter, he unfolded central theological ideas like the righteousness of God, the depravity of humanity, justification by faith in Christ, sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit, and unity among Christians.

Yet as Paul closed his letter, he left his dear readers with a final, essential exhortation—to “watch out” for boars in God’s vineyard ([Romans 16:17](#)).



Observation: Identifying the Boars

Read [Romans 16:17–20](#), and as you read, note some key observations about what Paul said about the boars in the Roman church. For this phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method, focus only on what the text says.¹

Why did Paul warn the Roman Christians to avoid the boars? According to [16:17](#), what were these boars doing to the Christian community? According to [16:18](#), how were they accomplishing these things?



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According to *Romans 16:18*, whose interests do these dangerous people serve through their problematic behavior?

According to *16:19*, what behavior distinguishes the true laborers for God from the boars in His vineyard?

What refrain of hope did Paul offer in *16:20* despite the presence of the dangerous boars?

Those in the church who are less mature don't know that they're around people who can't be trusted. They don't realize how innocent—how gullible—they are. They are like defenseless sheep seduced and led astray. That's why they need you. That's why they need a strong shepherd, a faithful shepherd. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: Assessing the Damage

The apostle Paul's letter exposed the boars in the vineyard of the Roman church. These boars chewed at the church's unity by causing dissensions and upsetting people's faith (see *Romans 16:17*). Understanding the meaning of these two problems will reveal timeless truths valuable for any church today.

First, these boars created factions within the church. One of the most natural divisions in the early Roman church would have been between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Why would such a division have created problems for the Roman church? Why is it essential for any Christian community to maintain unity?

The second kind of harm against Christian communities is a little more difficult to understand. Paul warned that these boars would "cause a scandal." The Greek word *skandalon* often describes a trap, and in this case, it specifically depicts something that causes someone to stumble into sin.

In what ways does false teaching lead someone into sin, upsetting his or her faith in God? Why is this false teaching harmful to a Christian community?

Realize, individuals who have gained the mastery over a few people often have a following. Those loyal followers don't see the danger in the one they're following. But you do. You'll be misunderstood by some by dealing with it. But you must take it on privately, personally, and directly. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Confronting the Boars

You might be wondering, “What do I do if these boars have infiltrated *my* allotted portion of God’s vineyard?” Thankfully, Jesus taught His disciples a three-step approach for handling persistent sin in the church.

According to [Matthew 18:15](#), what is the first step to take if a fellow Christian sins against you?

If this person continues to sin, what is the next step, according to [18:16](#)?

In some instances, however, this brother or sister will continue to sin. According to [18:17](#), what is the final step in this process of confrontation?



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Jesus' goal wasn't simply to eradicate the boars from the vineyard. Rather, He wanted to restore them to the community so he might transform them into laborers for the kingdom of heaven. Although everyone acts boorish at times, Jesus offers forgiveness, not just seven times, but "seventy-seven times" (*Matthew 18:22*). His forgiveness is as abundant as the water in the sea.

Application: Working in God's Vineyard Today

As you labor in God's vineyard, keep in mind the following exhortations when facing boars who seek to undo all your church's hard work for the gospel.

1. *Vigilantly watch for boars who cause damage.* Specifically, look for those who create division and lead others into sin.
2. *Courageously confront those you've identified as boars.* And always follow the guidelines of *Matthew 18:15–22*.
3. *Continually seek restoration with them.* Remember, the goal isn't to kick them out. You should desire to welcome them back into the community as co-laborers for the gospel.
4. *Prayerfully allow them to walk away if they refuse repentance.* This sad ending won't happen often, but be prepared for the times when it does.

Are any boars wreaking havoc in your allotted portion of God's vineyard? Which of the four exhortations above do you need to heed right now?

Don't be afraid of doing what is right. Don't be afraid of standing against what is wrong.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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What kinds of divisions exist in the church today? What specific matters do boars tend to exploit in order to divide your local church? What would it look like for your community to maintain unity in Christ despite natural diversity and difference in opinions and preferences?

What steps can you take right now to prepare yourself for a time when a boar might enter the vineyard of your Christian community? A conversation of confrontation will always be difficult, but it will be easier with preparation.

Boars will continue to roam God's vineyard until Jesus returns. Until then, however, any human effort to subdue a boar simply will cause more damage. Thankfully, Scripture provides counsel for facing these fearsome boars in a way that is both honoring to God and fruitful for the church.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for offering me wise counsel through Your Word. Multiply my wisdom as I prepare to confront the boars who seek to uproot the fruitful work of the gospel in my Christian community. Transform me into a laborer for You and for Your good purposes. I cannot do it on my own. Thank You for supplying the strength to serve You well. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

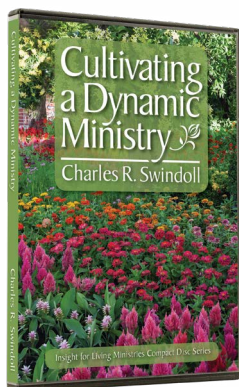
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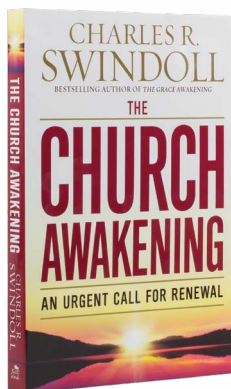
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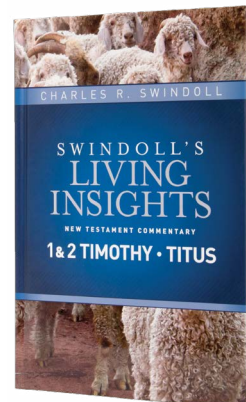
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For the 2023 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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