**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

***Ten Weeks After “The” Resurrection / 1987 years ago***

***40 Days Resurrection Ministry***

**Simple Faith ~ Theological Degree Not Required**

*June 21st,* 2020 A.D. in The Year of Our Lord

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First things first…Happy Father’s Day. We pray for every father, that their life and witness be as the Lord has planned.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

This means fathers too. I know it is a pipedream, but, if we fathers were to have been the fathers we were called to be from the beginning, the world would be a better place. In addition, we could have saved a lot of heart-ache and sleepless nights. Unfortunately, our society does not provide “father classes” or “husband classes.” The public-school system does not either. And the Church has failed in this area. I always tell people that Renee and I got married while we still knew everything. If I could do one thing, it would be to teach young people about marriage and being a mom and a dad. This is part of the plan in building relationships with young adults and writing papers to them explaining life.

Like most young adults, before I realized, time had passed. I mean, just a few years, and I was the father of two by the time I was twenty-three with a thirty-year mortgage. It was on-the-job training. I was working sixty hours per week. At least, I had a few years on Renee’s parents who were in their teens with children. My father-in-law was a bit upset with me for making him a grandfather in his mid-thirties. However, most of America from my generation, or before, married early and lived through the same challenges. We were not unique. And that was the problem. Couples and parents with little adult-life experience were raising children. We all know there isn’t any perfect time to get married. Looking back, God’s grace intervened in the form of grandparents and older friends. We survived.

Studies now show that couples are older who marry and older when they have their first child. At least, there is more time to think about life and grow-up before becoming a father or mother. And now, as grandparents, we have had a lot of time to think about life. We are here to pass-on our experience. For those who will slow down and listen. This was one of my biggest challenges, slowing down and listening.

Psalm 46:10 "Cease striving [be still] and know that I am God;

So, through thick-and-thin, sickness and health, the good times, and the not-so-good times, by the grace of God, Happy Father’s Day.

**Theology Not Required**

I could not be a Calvinist/Presbyterian, Roman Catholic/State-Church, High Church Episcopalian/Anglican, Hyper-Dispensationalist-Premillennial-Pre-Tribulationist if I tried. I like the plow-boy or cow-boy approach God took. I mean, God came as a carpenter in a farming community. God called us to be like lambs and sheep and have the faith of a child. God, as Jesus, positioned himself to be the Shepherd at the door/gate.

But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. (John 10:2)

7 So Jesus said to them again,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. (John 10:7)

Jesus did not seek or ever earn a degree from schools of higher education. Jesus did not tell the “woman at the well” (John 4) or the “woman caught in adultery” (John 8) to memorize and be ready for testing any kind of catechism, prayer book or ecclesiastical writings. It was simple: go and sin no more! Paul was simple with God’s call. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). What we see in the Bible are accounts of what happened to people who surrendered to the Lord. We study them. It is true that God desires for us to have the same experiences of surrendering to Him. We may not know all the Biblical accounts, but God calls us in the same way.

I want to make one thing clear in reflection of the last few Sunday’s sermons. A person does not have to be a theologian and know all the details to which I pointed ~~to~~. God does call us to experience those details regardless if we can explain them. God calls us to a spiritual reality that fallen humanity with materialistic/naturalistic study can never qualify. From reading the Bible, we see that becoming a Christian is amazingly/remarkably simple. In the vernacular. . . “Get over yourself.” Surrender to God. Love God. This makes it possible for God’s Holy Spirit to come into your heart and guide your life and to love and forgive your neighbor.

Ok, let’s try another way to analyze salvation. We have pointed-out that John 3:16 begins with “God so loved the world” and ends with “eternal life.” There is only one qualifying element between these two points of *love* and *eternal life*. Belief! But wait, anybody can say they believe in God. So, how do we see this qualification of “belief?

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well;

the demons also believe, and shudder.

20 But are you willing to recognize,

you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

One more thing, in John 3:16, the word “believe” is an active verb. This means doing the things God calls us to do, just like James 2:19 declares that if a person “believes”, they will be spiritually active in life, not doing the things demons do. James points to Abraham who had faith in God. Some of the Reformation leaders had a problem with the book of James, due to the misunderstanding of works. They could see that the State-Church had abused merit-based salvation. James must be received with the balance of Scripture. Consider Romans 4 and Ephesians 2:8, as examples. If a person has real faith, they will produce works approved by God that He has planned for them in which to walk (Ephesians 2:10). For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). So, our works are God’s works in us. If a person claims they have a belief in God, but produces bad works then they walk in darkness and lie (1 John 1:6).

4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him

and *yet* walk in the darkness,

we lie and do not practice the truth;

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

This is the Biblical context of James’ letter. If a person has surrendered to God and God’s Spirit resides in their heart, their being, then they will produce good works. If they do not produce good works, the question arises, where is God in them? The works do prove a person is in right-standing with God. But good works are an automatic product of the Believer’s life. The Believer does not have to wake-up in the morning and plan to do good works so others can see they are saved, that they are righteous. Jesus said in Matthew 5:20:

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The hearts of the scribes and Pharisees walked in darkness. Their works were of themselves, not God. They only had the appearance of righteousness for public consumption. Jesus said in Matthew 6:16:

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Here is the text of James 2:20-26.

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

This faith from God, that Abraham possessed, produced the work to follow God and take Isaac to the altar of sacrifice. The faith came first and was the catalyst that produced the good work of God. This is why Abraham was justified and righteous to God. To be accurate, in this account, God was never going to sacrifice Isaac. God demonstrated that He was not like the man-made idols that required human sacrifice.

Reflecting upon Abraham, we Believers who have been given spiritual gifts by God, due to our faith, exercise those spiritual gifts by applying them with the fruits of the spirit. Therefore, “faith” produces our works. Faith affords us the ability to use our spiritual gifts, applied by spiritual fruits. This takes place because we are joined to God/Christ/Holy Spirit.

Paul declares in Galatians 2:20 that he has been crucified with Christ, and it is Christ who lives in him. Even though he still lives in a physical body, he lives by faith. In verse 20, Paul denies that right-standing with God comes through the Law and points to Christs’ death on the Cross. What does this mean?

20 "I have been crucified with Christ;

and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;

[water-baptism symbolizes this joining]

and the life which I now live in the flesh

I live by faith **in** the Son of God,

who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

[reflection upon Abraham – substitutionary atonement]

[God loved Abraham who lived by faith (Genesis 15:16)]

[Abraham made righteous through faith over 400 years before the Law was given to Moses (read Romans 4).]

21 "I do not nullify the grace of God,

for if righteousness comes through the Law,

then Christ died needlessly."

[right-standing with God comes through the Cross. Surrendering faith accesses the substitutionary atonement of the Cross.]

This means that the Believer’s mind is set on things of the Spirit and not the flesh. Even though we live in a fallen world, in perishable bodies, God/Christ/Holy Spirit lives in us. We have surrendered to God and invited Him to reside in our hearts. We have asked God to indwell us as exampled to the Hebrews in Ezekiel 36:37. This empowers us to live life spiritually free, make decisions and treat others as God wishes. Paul makes this clear in Romans. Paul, also makes it clear why others, who have not surrendered to God, live the lives they live.

Romans 8:6-11

6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

This passage in Romans sheds light on people who we see every day doing things that are against God’s intent and will for people. We see this in political leaders and our neighbors. We all can have a bad day, but when we see people make a life-practice (walk) of bad behavior we know they have not humbly surrendered to God.

So, we do not have to be theologians with the ability to point-out our lifestyle in the Bible. We leaders, and by extension all Believers, are called to know God’s Word. It is a more powerful witness to know the Bible. Paul writes to Timothy:

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. (1 Timothy 4:13)

The Believer’s life is guided by the Lord and therefore produces good thoughts and works. We are not on autopilot due to the turbulent fallen world in which we live, but we can rely on God’s Spirit to navigate us through the pitfalls of life. Amen