**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

**Paul’s Letter to The Saints in Ephesus**

*Chapter 1 – Life’s Words Count II*

*Paul’s Farewell to Ephesus Elders (Acts 20:16-38)*

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

**Paul calls the Elders of Ephesus to Miletus for a Farewell Address**

**Acts 20:16-18** 16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them,

**Paul’s Farewell address to Ephesus Elders / Acts 20:19-20**

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia,

how I was with you the whole time,

19 serving the Lord with all humility

and with tears and with trials

which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

20 **how I did not shrink**

from declaring to you anything that was profitable,

and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Verse 20 highlights Paul’s comprehensive teaching that was delivered in the most personal way. So, what was Paul *declaring* and *teaching*? The next verse makes it clear the spiritual things that are the most important points in Paul’s presentation of the Gospel Message - *repentance* and *faith*. If you were to tell someone today to *repent toward God* and *have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,* what would you be telling them? What is repentance? What is faith, and why Jesus? Why Lord? Why Christ?

**How does all this work? What is behind these words directed at the Elders who have advance knowledge of Paul’s context?**

**Acts 20:21** solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks

of repentance toward God

and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wants them to start (turn to God first) with God and point to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah (Greek – Christ) who is also God (Lord) in the flesh. Therefore, to have faith that Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross paid their debt for sin. This is the most important role of the Messiah. I mean, why does the world need a Messiah? To defeat all of our enemies in this temporal world? No. The Jews were looking for a Messiah to defeat all their enemies, but Jesus, the Messiah, rejected their belief and carried out the role of “Messiah” prophesied in Isaiah 53.

**But wait! Who is Our Audience Today?**

As a preacher of God’s Word, I have hope that my audience possesses some foundational structures in their mind about the world in which we live. It is my observation as I teach God’s Word, and you witness your faith, that there is a thought process ongoing in the minds of many people questioning the very foundational premises from which I and you are communicating.

**Why Do We Owe a Debt to God?**

**But wait - What God?**

**I thought we evolved from a random-undirected-meaningless-purposeless process?**

**The whole of public education is based upon evolution –**

**“No-God-required, needed or wanted”.**

**I do not need my life to be complicated by religion.**

**Who is this Paul guy? And Jesus is a made-up story anyway.**

**I thought the Bible has been disproven.**

**I know scientists have proven beyond a doubt that God does not exist.**

Here is the demarcation point for many in our secular world today, at least in the West (Europe and North America). What Creator? There is no Creator! We evolved!

Therefore, the whole teaching about the book of Ephesus often falls on ears that cannot hear; thus, eyes that will not see. The nuclear response to these questions that can be heard around the world is . . . **no, we did not evolve, there is not any scientific evidence for life originating from primordial soup.** All that talk is religious secular propaganda. Real scientists have well-documented the complexity of the origins of life and have mathematically proven that life was designed. The laws of physics pertaining to *causality* dictate that life is chemically and biologically designed by a creating-mind. What unbiased scientists do tell us is that biological life on earth is too complex and ordered to support a random-undirected meaningless-purposeless-process (R.U.M.P.P).

(See Scientists: Stephen Meyer, James Tour, Michael Behe and Douglas Axe)

The Bible proclaims the *best* process for life to survive on this earth in a fallen environment. Life is too complex to have evolved in a RUMPP. For life to survive, it must have purpose, order, direction and meaning. The family (Father/Man, Mother/Woman) unit in God’s design is the building-block required to perpetuate life for a civilized society. For an uncivilized society, all you need to do is destroy the family unit.

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To prove the obvious point that life without God fosters death and destruction, take a look at the American socialistic welfare system that removed the father from the family unit. For those of you who do not know. . . in 1963, (Johnson Administration) the Democrat Party expanded the federal program, “Aid to Families with Dependent Children”, promising to pay single women to stay single and have unlimited babies. This has destroyed the family unit in many American cultures. The people who followed the government’s policies have produced the largest entitlement society in American history. Without a father in the home - the government became their god of sustenance, their god for life’s survival, the god of entitlements. The government did not provide spiritual fathering, but godless socialized fathering. Children grew without a loving spiritual leadership. These children became/become angry and search for significance only to find the street gangs who become their teacher to survive for life. These fatherless groups have produced the largest prison population in the world. These prisons are in America – Home of the free? All of this was done to garner their vote. These welfare-purchased votes live on the government plantation with their welfare officers as their slave masters, and Democrat party politicians are their plantation owners. The Democrat party strives to keep their plantation manageable by providing abortion-on-demand. They want just enough votes to throw an election. Love for God and neighbor is not part of their ungodly secular religious belief or their thought process. Their targeted welfare people are a tool to gain their political objectives - a society without God. Without God in the way, they become “the religion of the people” - the opiate of the masses. People are not seen as created in God’s image for His loving purpose, but people represent numeric votes. The quality of their lives is insignificant. Their lives are created in a welfare test-tube to be poured-out at election time. They just have to be breathing to vote. However, we know that dead people vote determined through forensic study of past elections controlled by godless minds.

This is what happens when God’s plan for life is abandoned. God, the designer of life and our families has the optima plan for our physical survival and our eternal life. Even by secular definitions, for life to survive it has to reproduce. God’s plan proves that if followed produces the highest reproduction/survival rate and quality of life.

Now, if a person has not written-off my message in their mind as coming from a religious zealot, we can get to other questions. Receiving God’s Word requires the surrender to the scientific reality that there is the Creator-God; meaning a Creator who designed our world and the rules for us to live. This includes what is good and bad for our lives. This includes what we call morals. In other words – in the context of this sermon, to benefit from God’s Word, a person needs to reject Darwinian evolution’s teachings on the “origins” of life. Now we can address questions acknowledging God.

**But wait – God Paid Our Debt?**

**Then what is our part?**

This presence of “Messiah” begs the question – does a person owe a debt to God for sin? Human experience and the acceptance of an afterlife dictate that this life is measured. It is in our DNA -we cannot help but measure ourselves, and others, every day. This goes back to God our Creator.

Every person is accountable to their Creator for their life. The psyche of all humanity thirsts for forgiveness of wrong acts and thoughts. All people seek to be made spiritually whole. We observe that people who live a life with the feeling of unforgiveness demonstrate their unforgiven state with outbursts of anger and bitterness afflicting others.

God incarnated Himself as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) to bring an end to the enmity and strife (Ephesians 2:13-22) between mankind and Him and people and their neighbor. Our part is not a meritorious work but a surrender of our mind, heart and soul to God. This is a spiritual capitulation, of which - only God can measure (Ephesians 2:8). We see the results in each other on a daily basis, especially when life in most challenging.

Romans 7:15-25 is the hallmark text defining the struggle fallen humanity has with losing to the power of the *law of sin and death.* Paul compares the Law of Moses to which the Jews thought adherence would make them right with God. But Paul declares the Law of Moses only highlights sin. The Law does not give people the spiritual power to overcome sin’s practice or its outcome which is separation from God. Paul declares that, on his own, he is defeated by the law of sin and death.

God does not have Paul stop writing after this declaration of losing to the **law** of sin and death. No. God declares through Paul the victory is in the **law** of the Spirit of Life in the Messiah (Christ), named Jesus.

**Romans 8:1** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, **2** because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. (CSB17)

We are measured by our Creator and therefore judged for how we live our temporal lives. Revelation 20 provides the details of everyone’s “Great White Throne” judgement. Revelation 20 is the fulfillment of John 14:6. Everyone is judged! This is why Jesus is the only way. The Messiah, Jesus, is the only One who paid the price for our sin. The Messiah, Jesus, is the only Judge described in Revelation 20. Thus, all must go through the judgement of the Messiah, Jesus, to access the presence of the Father in His Heaven.

I understand people do not like to hear that their lives will be judged. So, they refute the existence of God. (Out-of-sight, out-of-mind.) We must witness to people that God’s love does not leave us powerless to navigate in this fallen world. God did not create us and say “figure-out victory in this life on your own”. NO! God provided the roadmap.

**In Genesis 3:22** The Lord God said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever." 23 So the Lord God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life. (CSB)

Once Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden, (Genesis 3 representing all of humanity), through God’s omniscience, He offered a path back to Him which is each person’s decision to accept (free-will-choice) or not accept. God is an equal opportunity Savior. God does not force people to be with Him. Through people’s own choices they live through the product of those life-choices. What is unfortunate is children become the victims of fallen man’s evil choices. Then, we know, those children grow-up and the cycle repeats. We were all children at one time. God calls for us to choose Him in the midst of life’s *fallenness*.

In God’s love and grace, He offered Adam and Eve a choice to return to Him, so they would not remain separated from Him. The text is most revealing in Genesis 3:22 and highlights God’s desire for all people. The words reveal that God does not want us to stay separated from Him, so He removed Adam and Eve from the Garden, preventing them from eating from the Tree of Life and remain in their sinful state forever without hope or ability to return to Him. In God’s love and grace, He did not want Adam and Eve or any person to stay in a fallen state of where the law of the power of death and sin regulate their lives. We have choices.

We see Adam and Eve in a restored relationship with God in Genesis 4:25 when Eve praises God for allowing her to birth a son (Seth) to replace Abel. Through these biblical accounts, we see that God offers all fallen souls an opportunity to surrender to Him, which is everyone who has ever lived (Romans 1:18ff). Once we surrender to God, we have access to the eternal life-saving power of the Cross of God incarnate as the Messiah (Jesus). [refer to page 4 “Why we owe a debt to God”]

**Today’s Witness**

We have a similar witnessing task today. Most people believe there is a God and an afterlife. However, they are unaware, not sure, and doubt the *role* of Jesus. Why is Jesus “Lord” and “Christ”?

In today’s secular world, as always, people have questions and are limited in what they know and believe. Their sources of information are narrow and uninformed about the bigger picture of God. We will not have enough time here to have an exhaustive discussion about God. I see that we need to make some key points about God. Paul had spent almost three years in Ephesus when he sums-up his teaching in a few words. We should note that Paul was addressing the Elders of the church who possessed a more mature understanding of the Gospel Message.

Below are ten points about God. These ten points are not presented to be the first or last in a study about God. These are presented here to be talking points. It is important that we tell people that God knows who they are, and they can count on Him. God did not create us in His image for us to get lost in the melee of human carnage. However, due to fallen humanity’s wars and missteps, people often live and die as just a biological mass. People need to know that God is love and loves people, and He does not want us to live in fear but in victory (1 John 4, Romans 7). God did not allow a meaningless random biological and chemical process to create us. God created us to live victorious lives now and for an eternity. One day, when we temporally die or the Lord comes for us, we will exchange our corruptible bodies for incorruptible immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

**1.** God is the Creator (Genesis 1,2).

**2.** God created people in His image to have a spiritual relationship with Him.

(Genesis 1:26,27) And to have the choice to see the Way to the Truth to Eternal life (John 14:6).

**3.** God is not limited in the way He presents Himself.

(Genesis 32, Exodus 3, Incarnation)

**4.** God is Love (1 John 4:8) and God loves people (John 3:16).

**5.** God calls people to come to Him in a covenant relationship.

(Genesis 12, Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32)

**6.** God created and determined what is good (Genesis 1,2) and, at the same time, due to God’s unconditional love, He allows free-will choice for people to choose against His will. Where does evil come from? God does not create evil. God allows people to create evil. Why? Because God wants us to freely choose Him. God’s creation made love a choice to be chosen through adversity. Love is not experienced in a vacuum without any opposition. For love to exist, there has to be alternatives. People choose these alternatives, like Adam (Genesis 2:17; 3 / Cain / Pharoah / Herod / Judas)

**7.** God is all-knowing, powerful, and ever-present. (Throughout the Bible)

**8.** God’s love is greater and more powerful than sin and death (Romans 8:1-4).

**9.** God created us to have His Holy Spirit indwell our hearts, so He can direct our lives (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36; Romans 8:9; Galatians 2:20). He waits for us to invite Him into our hearts.

**10.** God’s grace covers the children (Mark 10:13) and those mentally impaired.

Unfortunately, due to human sin, the biological genetic code has been altered leading to people being born who are defective and do not have their full mental compacity to interact with God. God’s grace covers these people.

**2 Corinthians 12:8-9** 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

**Isaiah 40:28-29** Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding. 29 He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless. (CSB)

We see all of these ten attributes/characteristics (and more) about God spoken by Paul during his ministry. Acts 20:22 directs our attention to God’s Holy Spirit being “bound” in Paul and testifying through him (v. 23). From the beginning of Paul’s calling (Acts 9), he knew that afflictions awaited him in the service of God.

**Acts 20:22** "And now, behold, bound in spirit,

I am on my way to **Jerusalem**,

not knowing what will happen to me there,

23 except that

the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city,

saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

But look to what Paul has to look forward. He seeks to finish/fulfill (v. 24) God’s calling in his life. Paul knows and wants others to know that he received his calling directly from God. Paul sees and accepts that his temporal life is to be spent and exhausted in delivering God’s Good News to Jews, gentiles, Kings and rulers.

**Acts 20:24** "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself,

so that I may finish my course

and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,

to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

How does Paul present the Gospel? As the “grace” of God. Grace means that His Gospel cannot be earned; we must surrender to Him. This means that all the Law of Moses, all the pagan cultic rites, all the manmade *stuff* anyone is placing in front of a relationship with God is not of God. This truth is evident from Genesis to Revelation, from the beginning of man’s creation through the time of God’s incarnation as Jesus Christ, to today and eternity. Ephesians 2:8-9 sums-up God’s intent for establishing a saving relationship with Him. For by grace, you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Standing before the Ephesus Elders, whom Paul poured-out his soul in the face of life-threatening opposition, he presents his final words.

**Acts 20:25** "And now, behold, I know that all of you,

among whom I went about preaching the kingdom,

will no longer see my face.

26 "Therefore, I testify to you this day

that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 "**For I did not shrink**

from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

We all have been given gifts from God to function. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 brings to mind the Believer’s anguish if they did not use the attributes, gifts and talents God bestowed upon them. What more can we say than what Jesus taught in this parable? Who wants to be in a state of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”? The Apostle Paul was given every gift and talent to fulfill God’s calling. Paul was intelligent, able to preach, write and teach, enduring, persistent, physically strong coupled with an independent stubbornness that only yielded to God.

What is the whole purpose of God from which Paul did not shrink? The delivering of the Gospel Message.

One of the most important duties in fulfilling the office of Elder or Overseer of a local congregation is to protect them. An Elder must keep diligent guard for his own spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing. It is the responsibility assigned by God’s Holy Spirit to an Elder to protect the members of the church. This means both physically and spiritually.

**Acts 20:28** "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,

among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,

to shepherd the church of God

which He purchased with His own blood.

Paul knows that he is just one person. He knows human nature. Paul knows that his presence as God’s Apostle carries weight in the community. Paul knows that savage wolves are to some degree kept at bay by his presence. He was one of the few people to possess the knowledge of the Law of Moses and the teachings of Jesus.

**Acts 20:29** "I know that after my departure

savage wolves will come in among you,

not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things,

to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul also knows, like with Jesus in John 6, there are those who attend who are “*fence-riders*”. These will raise their heads, being either self-consumed with pride, deceived or ignorant, and create doubt or dissention. Elders should be of the ever-present mind that they serve in a fallen perverse world that seeks to devour God’s people. The Pastor’s (Elders) role includes protecting the congregation from wrong teaching and evil acts.

**Acts 20:31** "**Therefore** be on the alert,

remembering that night and day for a period of three years

I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

The Word of God is inseparable from God which represents and speaks His grace in order for us to be built-up. Remember, the “Word” became “flesh” and lived with us (John 1). So, the Word is more than black ink on white paper. The Word is God, whose Spirit is maturing Believers all the time (sanctifying) who have received an inheritance to eternal life with God.

**Acts 20:32** "And now I commend you to God and to the **word** of His grace,

which is able to build *you* up

and to give *you* the inheritance

among all those who are sanctified.

Paul, the Apostle, Missionary and Evangelist called by God and martyred for His calling, was not a charlatan T.V. preacher conning *seed money* from his flock. The T.V. personality con-artists have hands too soft and their fingernails too manicured to work to support their lives. These con-artists are equivalent to the moneychangers in the Temple that Jesus drove from the Temple. They have turned their local church into slot machines. They teach - if people throw enough money at God, one day they might get rich. We have a proper biblical teaching from Paul about supporting Elders or Overseers in the Church.

**1 Timothy 5:17-18 CSB** 17 The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages.

**Acts 20:33** "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

34 "You yourselves know

that these hands ministered to my *own* needs

and to the men who were with me.

Paul ties his lack of coveting to giving. Paul viewed his service to the Church as an offering. Thus, to Paul, he received a greater blessing to give his service to God.

**Acts 20: 35**

"In everything I showed you

that by working hard in this manner

you must help the weak

and remember the words of the Lord Jesus,

that He Himself said,

'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**End Of Paul’s Address**

36 When he had said these things,

he knelt down and prayed with them all.

37 And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul,

and repeatedly kissed him,

38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken,

that they would not see his face again.

And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Have you contemplated about writing an “*end of life letter*” to your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and to your future generations? What are the most important things you want them to know about you, about what you believe about God? I pray God gives you the words. I truly believe we all should have a farewell address to our families. **AMEN**