**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

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

**Good over Evil**

**Faith Trumps Works**

*Chapter 2:1-10*

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

In chapter 2, Paul, the constant encourager, is lifting the Believers in Ephesus in prayer to God and reminding them from where they came and who they are now and who is the head of their assembly. It is not Paul, but Christ who is the leader of their congregation. The last verse of Ephesians 1 declares. . . 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

This relational declarative aligns with Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel: 17:20-23.

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

These two previous verses (Eph. 1:22,23) set-up what Paul is going to write next. Yes, Paul is repeating Jesus’s wishes He spoke in John - that Believers be perfected in unity. The first unity Paul identifies for them was the way they were all unified in a sinful life prior to their surrendering to God. Then, as they became Believers, they are all unified under the leadership of Christ.

**Ephesians 2**

**1** And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins,

**2** in which you **formerly** walked

according to the course of this world,

Verse 1 identifies the spiritual condition of people prior to becoming in right-standing with God. What state was that? A dead state! Why? Because they allowed (chose) their sinful life to defeat them. They were (are) the “Walking Dead”, before the T.V. series was produced. Spiritually speaking, without God’s Spirit indwelling a person, they are spiritually dead. This is not intended to be a put-down but a call for all people to come to the realization that life without God’s Spirit leading them is not any life at all.

I find it not to be enlightening to remind people of their former miserable way of life. I mean, after you win the Super Bowl, how does it feel to hear from someone reminding you of the game(s) you lost? I see the design of Paul’s words are intended to be in the context of a humbling gratitude. Paul feels a need to remind them of their former estranged-from-God life for two reasons. They need to be in constant appreciation for what God did for them, and when they interact with non-believers, they should keep in mind that they, too, were once dead in their trespasses and sins.

**Verse 2** (cont.) according to the

**prince of the power of the air,**

**of the spirit**

that is now working

in the sons of disobedience.

Within these verses, we see Satan described as the “*prince of the power of the air, of the spirit”* that is currently, on-going, at work in people that are called “*sons of disobedience*” who are fallen people just like the saints in Ephesus used to be.

Satan can be identified by many titles or references in the Bible. It does not take too long to do an online search “Names of Satan in the Bible” to find good sources on the subject. I found one site called “Dummies” that actually had a good brief article about “Satan”. I guess their site was intended for people who were dumb about Satan. Gee, I wonder who that would be? Some people need to think about that question.

<https://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/the-bible/who-is-satan-according-to-the-bible/>

However, anyone doing a brief search about *Satan* in the Bible will see that the Hebrew word simply means *adversary* of God.

**Strong’s 07854** שָׂטָן *satan* )966b(

**Meaning:** *adversary,* also the name of the superhuman adversary of God

**Usage:** accuser, adversary, Satan

Other names for Satan include *Day Star, Son of the Morning* who was cut down to the ground after falling from heaven (Isaiah 14:12). This is in contrast to Jesus being the “Bright Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16) prophetically from the root and descendant of David. In the New Testament, the name “Devil” is assigned as the *Adversary,* *Slanderer*/*false accuser* when he tests Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11.

**Strong’s 1228 διάβολος** *diabolos*

**Meaning:** slanderous, accusing falsely

**Usage:** devil, malicious gossips.

Matthew 4:1-11: *Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1-13;* Hebrews 4:15; James 1:1

Here is another online source providing a list of names for the Adversary of God - Satan. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_80.cfm>

**Two Opposing Forces – Good and Evil**

From these Biblical texts in Ephesians, we see that there are two forces at odds in this world working against each other. These forces have opposing goals for life on planet earth. Obviously, this highlights the struggle that is often referred to as **good verses evil.** We all know that there are those in the world that reject the Bible because of the moral judgements the Word of God makes. Fallen people (sons of disobedience) reject God and His moral Word because they choose and allow themselves to be led by the *prince of the power of the air*, *of the spirit* who is at work in them. It is easy to come to the conclusion that these people are possessed by Satan.

Paul identifying Satan to the Ephesians is reminiscent of Job 1 when God asked Satan where he had been. “*The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it*" (Job 1:7). The issue is that Satan has an active presence in our world. Whether Satan is depicted as spiritual by Paul, or to some degree a manifestation of a physical presence in Job – the reality is that Satan is real and seeking to destroy life in God’s creation – that means you and I. Satan seeks to separate people from God. The #1 tool in Satan’s arsenal is to offer a self-seeking choice to us and see if we will bite. Hey! Adam – want an apple from that tree?

Satan tempts people with other offers all the time. When someone does/says something to you that is offensive - what is your first thought process? Being raised in Texas, men are culturally steered to respond very aggressively to offenses. *Turn the other cheek* was for Sundays. The prince of the power of the air is constantly offering alternative life choices away from God’s intent for our lives.

It is not very attractive to consider fallen people as being demon-possessed, being that Satan, himself, is the biggest demon. Jesus said, “The one who is not with Me is against Me” (Matthew 12:30). We, Christians, surely do not want to appear fanatical in declaring that those who have not surrendered to God are demon-possessed. We need to be more polite. I mean. . .why bring it up? What difference is it going to make? Is the Christian voice even heard anymore? What is your determination?

**Starfish**

Some of you have heard of the starfish on the beach analogy. So, bear with me for others to hear for the first time.

One Summer, two young men were walking along the seashore in the morning and came upon an incredible sight. Thousands of starfish had been washed upon the sand by the incoming tide. The fast-receding tide left the starfish stranded on the beach with the sun rising - soon to dry them out. They will all die in the hot baking sun.

As the two young men looked upon the endless beach with seemingly thousands of stranded starfish, one of the young men reached down and picked up a starfish and ran to the water’s edge and released him into the safety of the starfish’s life-supporting habitat. His friend called out to him, ‘You’re wasting your time. . . there are too many of them . . . it is impossible to save them. . . they will all die soon.” The starfish-savior young man replied - “I can’t save all of them, but to the one I just placed back into the sea – it will live. I made a difference for that one”.

We all most likely know of someone to whom we can witness and make a difference in that one person’s life. I try to make this a goal when I meet someone who is in obvious distress.

I see that we have millions of people stranded on life’s-beach, washed onto the shore by the tide of pride, unforgiveness and fear developed by a dearth of love and a life that lacks the experience of God’s grace and peace. Born in the tide - of the welfare-state or other manmade tsunamis - The *prince of the power of the air, of the spirit* wants them to die in their defeat. They are told by themselves and others that there are too many of them and their lives are too far gone. They believe they are lost forever and live their lives that way.

There was a criminal to the right and left of Jesus, as they all three hung on their cross. The sinful tide of fallen man had washed them all upon their cross. Two deserved to be there and One was sinless – The Messiah. From the Cross, God, as Jesus, reached-out to both men stranded on their deserved-Cross. Unlike the young man on the beach who could only reach one starfish at a time – God reaches-out to all of us at the same time and has the ability to receive all of us at the same time. However, only one man did surrender from his cross. The other man rejected God. So, this is the reality of fallen humanity. Even in the face of death, sin’s grip is defiant. Remember that Paul confesses that he loses to the power of the law of sin and death. However, the power of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus had set him free (Romans 8:2). God says . . . 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me’ (Revelation. 3:20). And so, one criminal beside Jesus opened his door.

**The Prince of the Power of the Air today**

To anyone who is paying attention, we do see that Satan is at work in people, organizations, political parties, businesses, education and in the totalitarian/dictatorial régimes around the world. We see Satan reported to be at work every day through the media. We know that through the *airways* of technology – *the sons of disobedience* use that technology for evil purposes. I am not saying that the media technology is evil; I am saying that some who use the media are evil and that evil things are reported. Every kind of crime and injustice is reported throughout the day. How can anyone deny that there is not evil in the world? This begs the question – what makes evil so bad? God is good. God’s moral standards cannot be ignored in the presence of evil. There would not be evil if it were not for the existence of God’s moral standard of what is good.

Atheists will make their observation that they cannot believe in an unjust God who allows pain and suffering in the world. Without going into a discussion about free-will-choice and pain and suffering – the atheist just stole from God (who they claim does not exist) to report their view. Frank Turek, in his book, “Stealing from God – Why Atheists need God to make their case” makes this point. . .that the atheist has to call upon God’s moral code of justice to refute Him. Does that make logical sense? I deny God or His moral code exist, but I call upon the very Being’s moral code to attempt to prove a point.

**The Devil Made Me Do It**

The Devil has never gone away. The decade in my teen years seems to be the most rememberable. In the 1970’s, there were comedians making jokes about the Devil. The comedian Flip Wilson’s comedic act included the line, “The Devil Made Me Do It.” The line was directed at a person who put off their responsibility for their evil actions upon the Devil. The audience would laugh every time the punchline was used. But, behind the laughter, everyone knew there was a little truth to the line. Good comic acts have a bit of truth to them or they would not be funny. With that line, there was an acknowledgement that the Devil was active in the world.

**Satan is Alive and Well**

There was a book published in 1972, Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey, a popular fictional religious writer that highlighted the point of Satan’s presence and works through people in our midst. The book was in a series about End-Times that made Mr. Lindsey a lot of $$$. What was true in his book was the fact that Satan is alive and well on planet earth. At least, the book got a lot of people to think about the real presence of the leader of darkness, lies, deception, death and destruction.

Our day bears striking resemblance to the leadership and people of Judah in the days of Isaiah. It is a great day of sadness when we Christians must point-out this comparison to our neighbor. Eventually, the Hebrew tribe of Judah was conquered with the walls and Temple in Jerusalem destroyed by 586 B.C. The surviving people were taken into exile as slaves of the Babylonians. This was the Temple Solomon built, completed by 950 B.C. Thus, it had stood for over 360 years. What we as Americans can receive from this observation - is that God is long in His patience for people to respond to Him.

**Isaiah 5:13-23**

13 Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their honorable men are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst.

14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; And Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry and the jubilant within her, descend into it. 15 So the common man will be humbled and the man of importance abased, The eyes of the proud also will be abased. 16 But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness.

17 Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy. 18 Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes; 19 Who say, "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!" 20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! 22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink, 23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

**God or Satan**

God desires for people to freely choose to surrender to Him and have His Holy Spirit guide their lives – living a life of faith, grace love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, righteousness, peace and forgiveness. We need to witness to others that this is the core of the Christian life. The attributes from God are spiritual. Notice that the prince of the power of the air is spiritual too. From my experiences in life, how could anyone deny that there is a spiritual realm to our existence? God calls to us to choose Him over His adversary.

In verse 3, Paul addresses the nature of people. The nature of people is a spiritual observation about the core character of their being – their heart condition.

**Ephesians 2:3** Among them **we** too

all **formerly** lived in the lusts of our flesh,

indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind,

and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

In verse 3, Paul also includes himself into the “formerly” category of those who once allowed sin to rule their lives. Paul knows all too well what life was like without God’s Spirit at work in him – he was promoting the stoning of Stephen (Acts 9).

In verse 4-6, Paul turns attention to God’s mercy and love that made people alive and even though dead in their trespasses, raised them up through faith. This qualified them to be seated with God.

**Ephesians 2:4** But God, being rich in **mercy**,

because of His great **love** with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions,

**made us alive** together with Christ

(by **grace** you have been saved),

6 and **raised** us up with Him,

and **seated** us with Him in the heavenly places

in Christ Jesus,

7 so that in the ages to come

He might show the surpassing **riches of His grace**

in **kindness** toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul’s teaching leads to verse 8-10, which is one of the most declarative statements in all the Bible.

**Ephesians 2:8** 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.

10 For we are **His workmanship,**

created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, a

which God prepared **beforehand** so that we would **walk in them.**

These three verses leave no doubt that we cannot earn our salvation. At the same time, they point to our Creator and the purpose we are created – for good works. Once again, we are directed at what is “good” in contrast to what is bad. God’s good is inescapable in the creation. When we get up in the morning, we should be seeking to do God’s good for Him and for others. In return, our lives are improved, and we are at peace with God and our neighbor - which fulfills God’s greatest commandments to love Him and our neighbor.

In addition, we see that in God’s perfect knowledge, He knows our decisions and has plans for us to accomplish. Our goal is to seek the spiritual steps we need to take to fulfill the good works God already has planned for our lives. Through prayer, reading God’s Word and interaction with other Believers, we can accomplish God’s good works together in the unity of His Spirit. AMEN