**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

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

**- Find Peace in God -**

*Chapter 2:11- 22*

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

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

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands--12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**What is Paul saying in verses 11-13?**

First of all, if I was an outsider looking into Judaism or Christianity, I would ask…. What is circumcision? And then when I knew what it was, I would think . . . what an odd way to show a religious affiliation. So, why did God choose this act for Abram and his descendants? I am not aware of a biblical explanation. With that said, my observation is that God wanted to get and retain the attention of every man - so that they would not forget their covenant with God. It is just that simple. Even with this sign practiced throughout Hebrew history since Abram, the people still rebelled against God. This rebellion demonstrates a need for God to construct a covenant sign that would not be forgotten.

The Jews in Jesus’ day misunderstood the covenant and the sign. The act of receiving the sign did not justify a man to God. It was an outward sign, designed to point to the condition of a man’s heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses writes for God in saying, “*Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live*.” This verse clarifies God’s intent in implanting the physical covenant sign of circumcision.

 Jesus asked us to participate in the covenant sign of Water-Baptism. Water-Baptism witnesses our heart condition; witnesses that our hearts have been cut/pierced. We see this in Acts 2:37 when the Jews responded to Peter’s Holy Spirit preaching being “pierced to the heart” as in God’s call in Deuteronomy 30:6.

 Just to be sure, and let everyone know, there is not any Biblical requirement to be in “right standing” with God, taught by Jesus, for male babies to be circumcised on the eighth day. This clearly was for the Jews at a specific time. Today, families may have a health reason for this practice.

**Life Without Circumcision**

Keeping in the context that God includes everyone in His call to salvation, Paul notes that those outside Judaism “uncircumcised” are included in the covenant offering from God. The establishment of the covenant sign of “circumcision” starts with Abram, when God changed his name to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-14; 1900 BC). This is after God called Abram to His purposes (Genesis 12) and established the covenant of faith (Genesis 15:6).

Paul makes this abundantly clear in Romans 4 by asking the question – “For we say "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 10 *How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised* (Romans 4:9-10). Furthermore - *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith*. (Romans. 4:13). . . and continuing in verse 16 *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all”*.

This also alerts the Jews to the fact that they are not alone in God’s providential call to salvation. The incarnation, the teaching ministry of God, as Jesus, the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension are for **everyone who has ever lived** from the beginning of the Creation (Romans 1).

**John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; **2** and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

**John 1:29** The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

**John 4:42** and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

**1John 4:14** We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

 Note that Paul says the Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. . . strangers to the covenant . . . having no hope . . . without God in the world. Paul is clear that the blood of Jesus applied to them (Gentiles) also as a covenant offering. Remember that the promised covenant to Abraham (1st Patriarch of the Hebrews) was a blessing for the whole world (Genesis 12:3; 18:18) which came 430 years **before** (Galatians 3:17) the Law was given through Moses. Paul writes, in Galatians 3:24, *Therefore, the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.* Thus, the Law pointed to Christ in that people could never keep the Law perfectly and would fail, thus needing a Savior. Furthermore, James (the half-brother of Jesus) writes - *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all* (James 2:10). Then a person would need God’s loving grace but only accessed through a surrendering faith which is the message of John 3:16. We also receive Paul’s letter to the Galatians explaining that the covenant (that a righteous man shall live by faith) was established by God 430 years prior to the giving of the law.

**Galatians 3:11-19**

11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for,

 "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary,

 "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law,

 having become a curse for us-- for it is written,

 "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "--

 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

 15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

 17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

 18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

 19 **Why the Law then?** It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

 The focus Paul makes is directly upon Christ who is the *propitiation* for the sins of the whole world (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, 4:10). Which means the debt was made to satisfy a debt owed. Basically, a credit to the account of every person who ever lived. However, the Christ-credit can only be accessed through a surrendering heart (faith) to God. There are many passages that answer this question: John 3:16, Romans 4, Ephesians 2:8 and many more.

 This teaching opens the discussion into everything about accountability to the God of creation. We know that many people in North America and Europe do not recognize God or anything the Bible has to say about human accountability to anyone. I have preached many sermons on the atheistic/agnostic worldview to highlight their bankruptcy of serious thought about the godless origins of life. In reality, human nature, as fallen as it is (total depravity), screams for love, grace and peace. These three cannot be attained from within fallen humanity. The love, grace and peace people seek that will satisfy their despair can only be brought forth by the God of the creation. We know that the Bible proclaims that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that God loved the world so much that He incarnated Himself as Jesus Christ/Messiah (John 3:16) who sacrificially went to the Cross paying the price for sin that the Law could never satisfy.

**Where in the Bible can we turn for clarity of God’s intent and actions as Jesus that addressed the Law?**

 The whole book of Hebrews is a great place to start. It is often suggested that the Gospel of John is a good first read in understanding the New Testament (N.T.). However, the book of Hebrews is the most detailed teaching we have regarding the transition from the Old Testament (O.T.) to the N.T. Understand, that the N.T. and O.T. titles were added by man. There is not any “new way” to be saved by God. There were new events that took place in fulfilling the whole Law that could not be accomplished by people. Jesus fulfilled the Law by becoming that one unblemished sacrifice, satisfying the requirements of the Law. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law, but the Jews misunderstood the intent of the Law and Jesus’ role in fulfilling the Law (Matthew 3:17). The Jews misunderstood and misapplied the Law upon the people. Here, in **Matthew 9:10-13**, is a good example of Jesus redirecting their understanding of the Law.

10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 "But go and learn what this means:

'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' Psalm 51:17

 for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

**Hosea 6:6** For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

**1Samuel 15:22** Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

**Psalm 40:6** Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.

**Psalm 51:16** For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are

not pleased with burnt offering.

**Psalm 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

**Proverb 21:3** To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.

Many of us know that Jesus pointed to the two great commandments that will fulfill the whole law and the prophets.

**Matthew 22:37-40**

And He said to him,

 "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART,

 AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.

 39 "The second is like it,

 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

In the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus repeatedly correcting the Jewish misunderstanding of the Law when Jesus says, *“You have heard that the ancients were told. . . But I say to you”* (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-34, 38-39, 43-44,).

Now, back to the focus on the book of Hebrews where we have the defining statement regarding Jesus’ role in fulfilling the Law. Notice all the O.T. passages referenced.

 **Hebrews 10:1-18**

 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

 3 But in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins year by year.

 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

"SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; Psalm 40:6

 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. Psalm 40:6

 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" Psalm 40:7

 8 After saying above,

 "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them" (which are offered according to the Law),

 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." Psalm 40:8

He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time,

SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

 13 waiting from that time onward Psalm 110:1

UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," Jeremiah 31:33

 He then says,

 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." Jeremiah 31:34

 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things,

there is no longer any offering for sin.

**Application of the Gospel**

We know from human experiences around the world that humanity, on their own, fails to put forth grace that leads to peace. Why? Because without the Love of God flowing through their heart, they fail. My historical observation is that every time a people group has found peace, it was through war. Every peace treaty signed in world history means that prior to the signing of the peace treaty there was non-peace, a conflict. Many of these peace treaties lasted for a limited time – until the next war. Often, we see that the peace treaties or cease fires do not last beyond the drying of the ink.

We see this currently around the world and in our face through modern media. No more acutely painful than the events on-going in Afghanistan. Where is the love of God? Not in the Taliban, nor in the corrupt leadership the Taliban replaced. The love of God is not in the coalition of Western leaders that allowed this whole debacle to take place. Where there is a lack or void of “love for neighbor”, there is a lack of love for God. The two go hand-in-hand, with the love for God first. Humanity and America’s best hope is in what God desires – compassion/love. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise* (Psalm 51:17-18)

Paul provides the complete statement defining Jesus Christ’s reconciling mission. The reconciling mission of sacrificial love calling all people to a surrendering faith in God - alone. This means that there is not any other path to a saving, right-standing relationship with God than by faith. This excludes any and all manmade meritorious demands through ecclesiastical towers of the historical state-church or any other organization pharisaic-robed order or tradition. There is only one being that can produce peace in fallen people – God. God came to be one of us in Jesus. The apostle Paul clearly declares that God is our peace.

**Ephesians 2**

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

 17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; Isaiah 57:19

 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

**AMEN**