**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**A Law unto Themselves – Fool’s Gold**

 **Ephesians 5: 17 - 21**

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November 21st In the Year of Our Lord - (Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

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

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 We continue our series in the Lord’s letter to the saints in Ephesus written down with pen and ink on papyri in about 61-62 A.D. by the Apostle Paul. The Lord had prepared the congregation to receive the letter, because Paul had lived with them for three years prior to his arrest in Jerusalem. So, this is to a personal correspondence that Paul knew would be passed onto others. We, too, can receive this letter as if God is writing a personal letter to us.

Remember that Paul was taken prisoner in Jerusalem and appealed his case to Caesar by asserting his Roman citizenship rights. Under Roman guard, Paul was taken to Rome over land and sea where he awaited his trial by Caesar. Paul wrote to his friends while chained to a Roman guard but was allowed to live in his own rented house (house arrest).

 Paul continues to ring the *sin-and-evil-alarm-bell* in an effort to awaken those who have fallen back (backslidden) into their old ways and as a continued reminder to others not to be seduced by the pagan secular culture in which they live.

 We start today in verse 17.

**Ephesians 5:17** So then do not be **foolish**,

 but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The context of “*do not be foolish*” in verse 17 looks back upon God’s instructions (verse 11-16) through Paul, not to participate or gossip in evil but expose evil with God’s light carefully walking awake in days of evil.

1. Do not participate with *evil*: v. 11

 2. Expose *evil*: v. 11, 13

 3. Do not gossip about *evil*: v.12

 4. God’s light exposes *evil*: v. 13

 5. Be “Awake” – Pay attention to what is happening around you: v.14

 6. Walk carefully: v. 14

 7. The days are *evil*: v. 16

 Last week, I focused more on “*participation*” with evil. I greatly appreciate the feedback I received. From those reviews, I can see there is an appreciation for God’s Word reaching-out to us and, at the same time, highlighting a caution that our human nature has a propensity to gravitate toward evil. One thing becomes clear in Paul’s letter to his friends in Ephesus. . . just because they are Christians does not guarantee they are immune from sin and evil. This is why Paul is writing the letter he is writing.

**Fools Don’t Win**

**Fools Follow Losers Over the Cliff**

 We have all heard of “*fool’s gold*”. A rock that looks like gold but really is not and is worthless. I see that practicing life without God is like pursuing pipe dreams in a fool’s goldmine. A person can work themselves endlessly and be a slave to their “*fool’s gold”* but never achieve the prize they seek. When they find their perceived prize and attempt to ‘cash in’ at the gold exchange, they are told what a fool they have been. With God, Believers win every day.

 ***The practice of sin and evil are not the way to be a winner in life.***

 **Sin and Evil in America - Fool’s Prisons**

It is easy to point to those in prison and see that they were *foolish*. America has the largest prison population in the world (over 2 million yearly). These represents a lot of *foolish* people. I see that anyone who is paying attention should realize that the ways of God produce winners in life, not *life-inmates*. These prisoners can be a product of failed parenting. We know that one of the leading contributors to teenage crime is the absence of a father in the home (or not being involved in their teen’s life).

 It is insightful that the country established under the Judeo-Christian law code has the most people incarcerated. Many of these are in prison for drug offenses (300,000), trafficking or using drugs. Currently, America has the highest per capita incarceration rate 639 per 100,000 people in the world. Half the prisoners in federal prison are there because of drug crimes. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-country>

https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2018/03/more-imprisonment-does-not-reduce-state-drug-problems

My observation. . . that here in America, crime is offensive against law-abiding moral people (majority are God-believing), who believe in holding people accountable for violating the law. In other words, rebelling against the God-code with criminal behavior has consequences in America. I see that historically America has a moral code based upon God’s Word and is willing to enforce God’s morality through state law.

***All foundational-law, for establishing a civilized society comes from God and is stated in His Word, the Bible.***

In agreement with this statement is evidenced on the East edifice of the U.S. Supreme Court building with the stone relief of Moses holding the Ten Commandments. The problem we have lately is that there are political leaders who have purposely ignored God’s code of Law in America that are actually on the books. . . like do not steal and lie. The problem is that State legislatures and office holders will not uphold the law.

**Case in point.** We saw ballot boxes come from ‘under the table’ in Georgia. I listened and watched online the Georgia State Assembly hold sessions on the General election last year, and the attorney for the election officials admitted they drove buses to serve as voting locations that were not prescribed by law. They also admitted to putting unattended ballot boxes in certain locations that were not prescribed by law. The Georgia legislature did nothing, even though the statute law was violated. These “law-unto-themselves” election officials are described in God’s Word. Many of us are familiar with the general statement, *“evil prevails when good people do nothing”.* In my lifetime, this statement was applied to the good people in Germany and Europe before and during the rise of the Nazi party and Hitler.

**Romans 1:21-25**

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their **foolish heart was darkened.**

 22 Professing to be wise, they **became fools,**

 23 and **exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man** and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

 24 Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

 25 For they **exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

**Personal Choices Affect Others**

We all see that leadership failure acting foolishly by not pursuing the will of the Lord in their lives. We all see that their *sin and evil ways*, not only are detrimental to them as individuals but affects all our lives throughout America.

These leaders are obviously not practicing life allowing God’s spiritual fruits to manifest and work through them.

The practice in life with God’s *fruits of the spirit* (Galatians 5) operating/managing our *spiritual gifts* (1 Corinthians 12) are optimal for success. This is only possible because a person has surrendered their heart and mind to God.

**A Winning Point of Clarification**

Do not think that winning in life, because God operates inside you, means that you’re going to win the lottery or the Super Bowl. Winning in life means first and foremost that you will be at peace with God and your neighbor. It is true. . . because Believers follow God’s rules and apply life-practices with godly ethics, a person may be more financially successful, popular and live a bit longer. My experience is that life in-the-fast-lane can end abruptly. So, Paul tells his friends, “Do not be foolish, understand what the will of the Lord is”.

**Ephesians 5:17** So then do not be foolish,

 but understand what the will of the Lord is.

It is obvious that those who participate in sin and evil are considered “foolish”. Verse 17 also presents at least two questions.

**The Big questions …**

**1. What is the will of the Lord for all of us?**

**2. What is the will of the Lord in your life?**

 The Bible details the **general will of God** for all of us. . . which is to surrender our hearts (circumcision of the heart – Deuteronomy 30:6) to Him. . . so His Spirit (rebirth of Spirit – Ezekiel 36 and John 3) can guide our lives. Ezekiel 36 provides one of the best scriptural texts that declares this truth in the Old Testament.

God holds us accountable for what we know. Therefore, after the historical event of the Incarnation, we, who know, are held accountable for our knowledge of the Cross and the atoning act of God. We see this accountability for what we know throughout the Bible as detailed in Romans 1:18ff). The end result. . . we can live at peace with God and our neighbor in this life and then we transition from this temporal life to our eternal life with God. This is the general will of God for all.

**God’s Will for His People Individually**

One of the more personal verses highlighting God’s will for us as individuals is 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.

It is my view that this verse makes it clear that God has an individual specific plan for our lives. It is up to us to prayerfully seek God’s will for our lives. And yes, we are called by God not be foolish in choosing the direction for our lives.

**This includes. . . do not be *foolish* about the friends we choose, the events we attend and the environment we choose to be in.**

In the context of not being “*foolish*”, Paul points to alcohol in **verse 18.** There must have been a problem with drunkenness or Paul would not have mentioned the issue. There is not any Scripture forbidding the drinking of alcohol. In fact, remember that Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding (John 2). So, the issue here is drunkenness not a prohibition against alcohol.

**18** And do not get drunk with wine,

for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

In verse 18, Paul contrasts being drunk, which alters a person’s mind and speech, with being filled with the Spirit. . . which will also alter a person’s total appearance and demeanor but to a likeness of God and not the fallen world.

 **In verse 19**, Paul continues to paint a portrait of the cultural and societal norms God has planned for the Christian community. In verse 19, we see a focus upon people and God that parallels the two Great Commandments (Matthew 22:36-40) to love God and our neighbor. Paul speaks of the relationship between people governed by our hearts focused on God. These relationships are founded upon and held together by one and the same power of God. . . *love*. With our hearts focused on the Lord, we are in the correct spiritual relationship with each other.

**19** speaking to one another

in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing and making melody

with your heart to the Lord;

**What does verse 20 say about our relationship with God?**

Since God created us and our world, we should keep the Lord in our constant thought with an appreciation that all things we possess are only possible through God.

**20** always giving thanks for all things

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

to God, even the Father;

 This verse sounds like it is just closing words to wrap-up a point Paul is making. However, there is far more here that a casual reader will miss if they do not slow down.

**Failure to recognize and give God thanks leads to a disastrous life that will affect others negatively.**

 Cain failed to appreciate that God was the One who created the environment for him to be successful. It is evident that Cain begrudgingly tilled the soil. We see that Cain brought an offering to the Lord *in the course of time*. . . meaning that Cain held back and waited because his heart did not give thanks to God. In contrast to Abel, who brought his firstlings.

**Genesis 4:3-5** 3 So it came about **in the course of time** that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the **firstlings** of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So, Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

 Cain’s offering was, to some degree, functionary and not given with the heart of appreciation. Cain disrespected God. Cain did not respond to God in love. Cain had a failure of love. We read in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 that *Love is patient, kind and is not jealous; love does not brag nor arrogant and does not act unbecomingly. Love does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*.

How many of these love attributes did Cain fail? Cain was jealous, sought his own way. . . becoming internally provoked in believing he suffered a wrong and did not bear-up or endure under his circumstances.

Therefore, due to Cain’s lack of love, he did not view or treat his brother Abel with love and respect. Cain also violated the two Great Commandments to love God and your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). This led to Cain’s resentfulness of Abel that developed into hate and murder. Remember Jesus’ correction of the Jewish understanding of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:21-24.**

 21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

 22 "But I say to you **that everyone who is angry with his brother** shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

 23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

 Cain’s offering was tainted. Jesus focuses on if someone holds a grudge against you. With the Cain and Abel account, it was Cain who held a grudge against Abel. . . for Abel having a better relationship with the Lord**.**

**The point being, that if there is a forgiveness issue, a person should go and attempt to settle the issue before they give an offering to the Lord.**

We see this same principle with Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 warning us not to take the Lord’s Supper if there is an outstanding issue. The Lord’s Supper includes giving thanks to God for what we have received from Him.

**1 Corinthians 11:27-31**

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

In contrast, Abel brought his **firstlings**. Abel’s heart was thankful and appreciating. **Therefore, in our reverence/respect for Christ, we are all to be subject to each other in love.**

**Note:** The Greek word φόβῳ (phobo) is referenced in Greek dictionaries. . . to be in the context use here. . . to mean reverence, awe or respect to the divine presence. For example, The English Standard Version (ESV) translates φόβῳ as “reverence”.

**ESV**: submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**NAS 21** and be subject to one another in the fear (Greek: φόβῳ) of Christ.

**AMEN**