**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

 **Be Nice!**

 **Ephesians 4: 25 -32**

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October 31st In the Year of Our Lord - (Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

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

 After Paul gives instruction concerning spiritual gifts and allowing God to give a new *heart and spirit* to Believers, he focuses on day-to-day personal relationship attributes. It is obvious that spiritual gifts (operating with a new heart and mind) should lead to being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving to others. Paul also spells-out the behavior a Believer should not be practicing. It is as though Paul is teaching a third-grade class. These are all foundational behaviors that form the nucleus of a civilized society. Should we all know that we should not lie or steal and have uncontrolled anger. . . living life in bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander against others? Do we have to be told to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving to each other?

 Well. . . I see that many people in public office need to read Paul’s letter. I think the mainstream network news anchors should read these words every night for one week. This would make news. For once, we would know that they were speaking the truth.

 **25** Therefore, laying aside falsehood,

SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR,

 **Zechariah 8:16** These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates.

for we are members of one another.

**26** BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and do not give the devil an opportunity.

**Psalm 4:4** Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

**Proverbs 14:29** He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

**Proverbs 19:11** A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

**Ecclesiastes 7:9** Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.

 **28** He who steals must steal no longer;

but rather he must labor,

performing with his own hands what is good,

so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

 **29** Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth,

but only such a word as is good for edification

 according to the need of the moment,

so that it will give grace to those who hear.

 **30** Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,

by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

**31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

**32** Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,

just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

**Christian Culture Makes a Difference**

Growing up in the rural south, most people in on-coming traffic wave at you when you drive down a country road. Even if you walk down a sidewalk or other paths, it is a “cultural thing” to wave or make some kind of friendly jester to the other person acknowledging them. We are just being friendly.

My observation is that there is more a sense of community in rural areas. People are not as stressed or have the same fear-level about strangers that pass by them. It is true, demographic studies historically report people attend church services more in rural communities. This accomplishes at least two significant cultural practices. One – people receive more communication on how to have a positive relationship. Two – when people come together in any group, they build a greater sense of community.

**Is There a Universal Language?**

**Yes. Body Language and Facial Expressions.**

Studies conclude that 90 percent of participants, regardless of cultural background, identified the same seven universal emotions in photos observing facial expressions: anger, disgust, fear, surprise, happiness, sadness, and contempt.

<https://www.britannica.com/story/is-body-language-universal>

The human need to be happy and loved is universal. Remember, Paul writes to the church in Corinth that love is the key element to life with God and neighbor (1 Corinthians 13 -*But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*). The two greatest commandments also declare this universal truth (love God and neighbor – Matthew 22:37-40). Salvation starts with God’s love as declared in John 3:16 *– For God so loved the world.*

**Sin Operates as Destructive Behavior**

Notice that Paul identifies destructive behaviors of people from verses 25-31 which are *falsehood, anger, stealing, unwholesome word, grieving the Holy Spirit, bitterness, wrath, clamor and slander*. Then in verse 32, he moves to a positive voice and encourages them to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. All of those destructive life-practices are overcome in the acts of tenderhearted kindness and forgiveness. Paul reminds his audience that God forgives them and God’s forgiveness should work through them. Paul words repeat Jesus’ teaching in the Lord’s Prayer.

 **Matthew 6:12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

These destructive behaviors are the tools of Satan that are continually offered to us to be used in our relationships. We need to also consider and reflect upon **Proverbs 6:12-23.**

12 A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, 13 Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers; 14 Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, Who spreads strife. 15 Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing.

 16 There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

And hands that shed innocent blood,

 18 A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that run rapidly to evil,

 19 A false witness who utters lies,

And one who spreads strife among brothers.

20 My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; 21 Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you.

 23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.

 No doubt, Paul, the Pharisee, knew this Proverb. He grew-up under this teaching. His father and mother taught him God’s Word and way of life. It is not hard to see the lacking in our time of the application of this Proverb and God’s words as He had Paul write to the Believers in Ephesus. God’s Word is the foundational building block of a civilized society. We shall repeat the words from America’s first President, George Washington, Farewell Address 1796, that he declared to the country and the world. Here is a paragraph from the 7,641-word document.

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to

political prosperity, religion and morality are

indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim

the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert

these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest

props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere

politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect

and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their

connections with private and public felicity. Let it

simply be asked where is the security for property, for

reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation

desert the oaths, which are the instruments of

investigation in courts of justice? And let us with

caution indulge the supposition that morality can be

maintained without religion. Whatever may be

conceded to the influence of refined education on

minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience

both forbid us to expect that national morality can

prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

**It is also worthy of a note from the U.S. Senate web site:**

No Senate tradition has been more steadfastly maintained than the annual reading of President George Washington’s 1796 Farewell Address. In this letter to “Friends and Citizens,” Washington warned that the forces of geographical sectionalism, political factionalism, and interference by foreign powers in the nation's domestic affairs threatened the stability of the Republic. He urged Americans to subordinate sectional jealousies to common national interests.

The Senate tradition began on February 22, 1862, as a morale-boosting gesture during the darkest days of the Civil War. Citizens of Philadelphia had petitioned Congress to commemorate the forthcoming 130th anniversary of Washington's birth by reading the Address at a joint meeting of both houses.

Tennessee senator Andrew Johnson introduced the petition in the Senate. "In view of the perilous condition of the country," he said, "I think the time has arrived when we should recur back to the days, the times, and the doings of Washington and the patriots of the Revolution, who founded the government under which we live."

Two by two, members of the Senate proceeded to the House Chamber for a joint session. As they moved through Statuary Hall, they passed a display of recently captured Confederate battle flags. President Abraham Lincoln, whose son Willie had died two days earlier, did not attend. But members of his cabinet, the Supreme Court, and high-ranking military officers in full uniform packed the chamber to hear Secretary of the Senate John W. Forney read the Address.

Early in 1888—the centennial year of the Constitution’s ratification—the Senate recalled the ceremony of 1862 and had its presiding officer read the Address on February 22. Within a few years, the Senate made the practice an annual event.

Every year since 1896, the Senate has observed Washington's Birthday by selecting one of its members, alternating parties, to read the 7,641-word statement in legislative session. Delivery generally takes about 45 minutes. In 1985 Florida senator Paula Hawkins tore through the text in a record-setting 39 minutes, while in 1962 West Virginia senator Jennings Randolph, savoring each word, consumed 68 minutes.

At the conclusion of each reading, the appointed senator inscribes his or her name and brief remarks in a black, leather-bound book maintained by the secretary of the Senate. Early entries in the notebook were typically brief explanations of the practice, accompanied by signature and date. Often, several entries appeared on a single page. In more recent years, entries have grown more elaborate and have included personal stories or comments on contemporary politics and policy. In 1956 Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey wrote that every American should study this memorable message. “It gives one a renewed sense of pride in our republic,” he wrote. “It arouses the wholesome and creative emotions of patriotism and love of country.” The book's first entry bears the signature of Ohio Republican Joseph Foraker and is dated February 22, 1900. Links to selected entries are included below.

Washington’s address was last read earlier this year.

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| --- | --- |
| **Rob Portman** (OH) | February 22, 2021 |

<https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Washingtons_Farewell_Address.htm>

 It is disheartening to know that Washington’s address is read yearly by the U.S. Senate and then, and obviously, promptly ignored by many of its members. We know this by the votes they cast. We know that many laws are passed ignoring morality and a sense of religious obligation. Washington’s words are not Constitutional law, but they are a guiding light for Senators to consider.

Senators specifically ignore these words**. . . Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?**

We have all witnessed the Senate hold a court impeachment trial in an attempt to destroy a person’s reputation through false charges. We have witnessed the Senate vote to fund abortion, therefore, murdering the lives of millions of babies. We have all witnessed the Senate steal people’s money (property) by passing legislation like the Affordable Healthcare Act. The list of immoral legislation passed by the Senate paves the road to Hell. Shocking words. They are intended to be. Believers need not lie. . . we need to state the facts.

 The vast majority of the people who vote for America’s elected office holders are totally ignorant of Washington’s Farewell Address and are just as unknowing about God’s Word.

 Consider these words in applying Ephesians 4 and Proverbs 6.

We constantly witness that too many public officials present falsehoods in an angry manner with hearts intent on stealing people’s property by their vote. They speak unwholesome words about citizens and their fellow congress person who oppose them - thus, grieving the Holy Spirit. They present bitterness seeking to issue uncontrolled wrath upon those who disagree with them by fraudulent indictments. They clamor for the destruction of the way of life of God’s people and slander their persons. This is seen in Christians being persecuted by the State for refusing to bake a gay wedding cake. The State clamors for the destruction of God’s family plan by promoting same-sex marriages and the teaching of transgender to children. The Proverbs passage sums-up who these people are. They do all these in an offense to God and his people.

17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

And hands that shed innocent blood, (abortion on demand)

 18 A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that run rapidly to evil,

 19 A false witness who utters lies,

And one who spreads strife among brothers.

**What is the solution to this evil?**

God chose for us, for Believers, to accurately witness His life-plan to people. We have many challenges to overcome to carry-out this task we call The Great Commission. We have the cultural challenge – meaning that we have to be careful not to overlay God’s Word, the Gospel, with layers of personal traditions. We need to consider in moderation such things as clothing, music and days or times of worship.

**Matthew 28:18-20**

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

 We need to make special note that Jesus commands Believers to go and make disciples first. . . and then baptize them. Jesus is talking about water-baptism. I have observed that many Believers in their evangelism witness God’s faith and then encourage a person to be water-baptized right away. Walk the aisle Sunday morning and come back to be water-baptized during the evening service. The focus is more on the act of water-baptism than on making disciples. Water-baptism is a physical act that is easily done. The making of a disciple takes a much longer time with trials and trepidations.

Evangelists have been known to point to the account of Phillip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8. They will point to the Ethiopian being water-baptized right away. However, the Ethiopian was reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Therefore, the Ethiopian already had knowledge of God and had Scripture in his possession. My experience is that most people have not read God’s Word. They know nothing about God and His redemptive plan and way of life. Therefore, in most cases, the push to water-baptize a person is premature. Jesus teaches that a person must become a disciple before they are water-baptized. When a person’s heart is transformed by God’s Spirit, they will seek water-baptism. Peter witnessed this at Cornelius’ house after the people spoke in tongues who had not been water-baptized. Peter said – "*Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"* (Acts 10:47). The context here is that the people wanted to be water-baptized.

My point to all of this - is that the Church has not accurately presented God or His Word. The result is that we have many who consider themselves Christians that are no more committed to God and His Word than the “man in the moon”. They are committed to their secular culture and see ‘bending to humanist ideas’ as the loving thing to do. They see themselves as brought into the Church through some meritorious act or tradition of man - but they never made a commitment to become a “disciple” of God/Christ with a new heart and mind indwelled by God’s Holy Spirit.

Real disciples of God do not knowingly vote for ungodly people to write and administer the secular laws of the land. There is the statement that a person is backed into voting for the lesser of two evils - in context of choosing a limited selection of candidates. The solution is for more real disciples of God to seek public office. No doubt, a real challenge in our world.

The reality is that the fallen world is fallen. We people of God are charged by God to witness to as many people as we can by word or deed. God knows the way and the gate is narrow to have a saving relationship with Him. Fallen people do not humble themselves to their Creator – therefore, they seek the gate that is wide and broad.

**Matthew 7:13** "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

 16 "You will know them by their fruits**. AMEN**