**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***God’s Love Challenge***

 **Colossians 1: 21-23**

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

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Last week, we focused onColossians 1:21 which encompassed the totally depravity of humanity. I had a few questions about that term “total depravity”. Sounds like a disease that does not have a cure. . . a hopeless condition humanity constantly suffers. In fact, people on their own do not have a cure.

However, Adam and Eve were not totally depraved before the Fall. They walked and talked to God freely without any thought or knowledge of an existence that could separate them from Him. Their thoughts and deeds were all good and pleasing to God. They did not possess the knowledge of good and evil. God created them to possess the ability to choose to gain the knowledge of good and evil. God’s love desired that they freely choose Him over other choices. . . that way, they were not forced to be with God or speak to Him.

**Total Depravity:** Without God reaching out to fallen humanity. . . people would not turn to Him. God’s Holy Spirit makes people aware of sin by exposing it to their consciousness (John 16:8, Romans 7). Again, people would be hopelessly lost to sin and death if it were not for God reaching out to them. God loved us first (1 John 4:19).

 Paul talks about the fallen creation in his letter to the Roman church.

**Romans 8:19-22**

19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Supporting Scripture highlighting Paul’s Roman letter.

**Jeremiah 17:9** "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”

**Ecclesiastes 7:20** There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins. (CSB)

**Ecclesiastes 9:3** This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

(See also: Romans 3:9-18; 1 Corinthians 2:14.)

**On a positive note. . . first things first.**

 I cannot stress enough that God, who is love (1 John 4:8) . . . Who created us in His image (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6; Ephesians 4:24; James 3:9) to experience love. . .that is loving Him and our neighbor (two greatest commands - Matthew 22:36-40; Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18) and living by His commands (John 15:10, 14:21; 1 John 5:3). The greatest gift God has for us is love (1 Corinthians 13).

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Therefore, God loves all of us, and with the creation, He planned for all of us to have a choice to have an eternal loving relationship with Him (2 Peter 3:9) and each other. God desires to be with us in Spirit now and in our presence forever in His heaven. To further God’s desire, He placed the “tree of life” in the Garden along with the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” for us from which to choose. God presented a choice to Adam and Eve chronicled in Genesis 2:17, illustrating to all of us, that from the beginning, He gave us a choice to choose Him over. . . and in competition with. . . other choices. These other choices are called sin. God gave Adam and Eve every opportunity to stay with him by choosing love/life over sin/death. Once Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s desire for them to live, He removed them from the Garden before they ate from the “tree of life” and lived forever (Genesis 3:22-24). Living forever? Wait. . . is not that what God wants us to do. Then why did he remove Adam and Eve from the Garden and away from the “tree of life”? Because God did not want them to eat from the “tree of life” in their present fallen-state of sin. . . and therefore, be eternally separated from Him.

 Even though they rebelled against God, He still gave them the opportunity to return to Him. And we see there was a return. In Genesis 4:25-26, Eve turns to God and praises Him as the giver of life, in that He “appointed” her another son (Seth) to replace Abel. This is encouraging to all of us. . . that we too have the same salvation opportunity despite our previous betrayal to God.

Adam and Eve represent the choice all of us have to oppose God. We can say that God created humanity with a nature to sin. . . that is to choose selfishly. . . exercising our pride over His will. Yes, and this is the challenge with which God created us. **The “love” challenge**. Jesus repeatedly stated that “if you love Me, you will follow my commands” (John 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10; 1 John 2:3, 5:3; 2 John 1:6; Psalm 103:17-18). Remember that we are created to experience love. . .the greatest gift (1 Corinthians 13). And for that experience to take place. . .we have to choose love over and through other options.

**Generational Sin**

 In Jeremiah 32:17-18, God tells us that the sins of the parents will pass to their children after them. In Exodus 34:7, God declares that the iniquity of fathers will be visited on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations. (See also: Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9-10.)

We see this generational sin carried out in our time with babies conceived in incest or by drug addicted parents. It’s hard to look at their physical and mental deformities and brings the question of where was God in all of this. We need to remember that God warned us to protect our bodies because it is a holy temple.

 **1 Corinthians 6:18-20**

18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.

**(See also 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:13; Ephesians 4:17-20; Galatians 5:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; Leviticus 18:1-30, 19:20.)**

The context of these Scriptures appeal to sexual immorality including incest. Today, most people do not realize that the act of sex was part of ritual idol worship to pagan gods. The worship of these pagan gods included child sacrifice.

In addition, our creator God, being all knowing, knew these laws would protect what we now know as the human genetic code. God’s medical science has revealed that children who were conceived in incest have abnormalities. Parents who took drugs also create abnormalities in their children. All these abnormalities are passed to future generations. Many people do not know what choices their parents, grandparents or prior generation made that adversely affected their reproductive system.

This is all unfortunate, but these are the choices God allows fallen humanity to make. God allows people and cultures to determine their own future. It is my opinion that the whole genetic pool of humanity is damaged due to sin, and we are devolving. We all know this fallen world will come to an end in God’s time. It is for fallen humanity’s own good that God brings this fallen world to an end.

King David also represents all humanity’s fallen nature. David illudes to this by praying. . .Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5). Other than the fact that David’s parents lived in a sinful world, I did not find that historical commentators viewed human conception or David’s mother to be sinful. David is pointing to all of fallen humanity to have the propensity (nature) to sin, and he accepts his responsibility alone (Psalm 51:2-4) in his sin. David does not blame God for making him sin.

And Job laments to God. . . "Man, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil. "Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain. You also open Your eyes on him and bring him into judgment with Yourself. 4 "Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one! (Job 14:1-5).

It should not go unnoticed that both Job and David make these statements to God. God does not make these statements to them. Job and David realize their fallen state, and God is the only one who can save them. Equal with Job’s acceptance “that no one else can make him clean”. . . David prays. . .

Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,

And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness,

Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

Hide Your face from my sins

And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from Your presence

And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation

And sustain me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:6-12)

 And so. . . is the challenge of man…to experience God’s love.

**The Good News**

Remember, we all, saints and sinners. . . have an eternal life. There is eternal life with God and eternal life separated from God and His heaven . . . and separate from all those who choose to humbly surrender to Him. Despite our disappointments and failings. . . God is always present and waiting for us to respond to His love and grace (1 John 1:5-10). God gave us the ability to respond and surrender to Him. We see this in verses like Genesis 2:17, Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32,Acts 2:21, John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:2.

And, of all things, the Good News is about forgiveness. From God first. We see this in Jesus’ own words from the Cross, “Father forgive them”. Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive his brother who sinned against him. Peter asked if it was up to seven times? Why seven times? Because the number 7 to the Jews is the Divine number of completion.

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. **(Matthew 18:21-22)**

**Colossians**

With these biblical contexts understood, people who have not surrendered to God and His plan for their lives are alienated and hostile in mind to Him. This is the cultural environment we receive the remainder of Paul’s letter. We will see the correlation and application of Colossians 1:21-23 to the fall of man.

**Colossians 1**

21 And although you were formerly alienated

and hostile in mind,

22 **yet** He has now reconciled you

in His fleshly body through death, [The Cross]

in order to present you before Him

holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

**23 if indeed you continue in the faith**

firmly established and steadfast,

and not moved away

from the hope of the gospel that you have heard,

which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven,

and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

 Ok, in these verses we see the progression from being alienated and hostile in mind to God to being **reconciled to Him.** . . made possible by the Cross.

 Once reconciled to God. with His indwelling Spirit empowering us to be victorious in the battle over the law of sin, we can live life at peace with God and our neighbor. The alternative, as we revealed. . . was that the 20th century suffered 231 million deaths through fallen human decision. Remember, we ended last week’s sermon with **Romans 8:9**. Let us read these verses again with the following verses included to shed light on Colossians 1:21-23. Notice the challenging “if’s” Paul constantly threw at his audience. This indicates that Paul had severe reservations if the Roman audience to whom he writes were really saved.

**Romans 8:9-17**

**9** However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,

 **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you**. [See also: 1 John 4:13]

**But if** anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,

he does not belong to Him.

**10** **If** Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,

yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

**11** **But if** the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

 He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies

through His Spirit who dwells in you.

**12** So then, brethren, we are under obligation,

not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--

**13** **for if you are** living according to the flesh, you must die; **but if by the Spirit** you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

**14** For all who are being led by the Spirit of God,

these are sons of God.

**15** For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again,

but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons

by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

**16** The Spirit Himself

testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

**17** and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

One of the best examples to illustrate Paul’s “**if**” statements is witnessed in **John 6.** People will follow Jesus/God/Holy Spirit as long as He meets their version of Him. Once their “religion of compatibility” to their chosen lifestyle is challenged. . . they then have the “Love Challenge”.

Jesus says. . . Do you love Me? Follow My plan for your life. . . . . . . .

 Oh no. . . I did not sign up for this. . .

I do not want to be challenged against my culture.

I’m just looking for a convenient make-me-feel-good about myself thing.

My Latte is getting cold. . . I got to go. . .

and this discussion has made me late for my transcendental meditation class.

**John 6:59-66**

59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?

62 "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?

63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

64 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

Proof of faith is seen in those who overcome the world. . .those who are with God at the end of life.

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world;

 and this is the victory that has overcome the world

 -- our faith.

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world,

 but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

**1 John 5:4-5**

(See also Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7.)

  **AMEN**