**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***So, I Need to be Reconciled to God?***

***Christianity 101***

 **Colossians 1: 19 - 20**

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August 7th, In the Year of Our Lord - (Anno Domini A.D.) 2022

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

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Key Passage in Colossians – verse 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

 Considering last week’s sermon. . . we now have a better understanding of why Jesus Christ is the head of the Church in heaven and on earth. We can proceed with the rest of Paul’s letter, written in approximately 61-62 A.D., to his dear friends in Colossae. Remember, Paul writes from his “house arrest” prison status in Rome awaiting his trial by Caesar. Of the thirteen New Testament letters Paul wrote, scholars call four of the letters the “Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) because he wrote them during this imprisoned time. Paul was eventually set free. Most biblical historians note that Paul’s Jewish accusers from Judea never came to Rome to testify against him. . . the Roman citizen. However, we know that Paul was arrested again within a few years and was martyred in Rome about 68 A.D.

**Jesus = Father**

 Jesus said that He could not do anything without the Father (John 5:19, 30, 6:38, 8:28, 9:40, 12:49, 14:10; Matthew 26:39) and, if you have seen Me, you have seen and known the Father (John 1:14, 8:19, 12:45, 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). So, it is understandable for Paul to see that the “fullness of God” lived, indwelled and inhabited Jesus.

**Colossians 1:** 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

 But then, why should the fullness of God dwell in Jesus?

**The answer is in the next verse.**

 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

having made peace through the blood of His cross;

through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

 Verse 20 summarizes the Gospel Message. (Also see 1 Corinthians 15.) This statement proclaims foundational elements to biblical Christianity.

***Through Him – Reconcile – Peace - Blood of His Cross - Earth and Heaven.***

**Through Him** can only be possible because God came to be one of us as Jesus Christ, making the perfect-sinless-sacrifice for the sins of the whole world on the Cross. There is not any other mediator (Job 33:23; 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24) in **heaven or on the earth** through which reconciliation comes or is dispensed. Last week’s sermon highlights the supremacy of God as Jesus Christ to fulfill this unique role.

Human history proves that people are hopelessly lost and cannot save themselves from total destruction. In order to gain the attention of totally-fallen-depraved-humanity, God chose the Cross to exhibit the ugly consequence of sin and death and the separation sin creates between our Creator God and our fellow human being. God chose to use blood as a life symbol.

**Leviticus 17:11** For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.

**Hebrews 9:22** And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

(Leviticus 5:11 exception for the poor)

Therefore, at the Cross God calls-out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). . . that by His love and grace, He makes the finishing payment (propitiation) Himself instead of the sinner. Paul uses the Greek word “hilasterion” in **Romans 3:25.** English translators translate “hilasterion” as “propitiation”. The Greek word Hilasterion means *mercy seat.*

whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation** in His blood through faith.

Ok, I know “propitiation” is a word we do not often use. So, here is the English Webster’s dictionary definition outside of a Jewish-biblical context.

The act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something”

Wow! Looks like we have two words seemingly to mean two different things. How do they join applications in God’s Word?

With the English Webster’s definition in mind, we can see that the goal of regaining favor (propitiation = forgiveness) with God in a Jewish context takes place at the lid of the Ark of the Covenant called the *mercy seat (hilasterion)*. This location is where the blood of a sacrificed animal was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. This act represented *substitutionary atonement* whereby an animal’s blood was dropped instead of a person’s blood. Obviously, this is what Jesus Christ did at the Cross. . . where His blood was substituted for ours. The Cross was the location and stands in for the location at the *mercy seat* in the Temple’s Holy of Holieswhere atonement took place.

**Propitiation**

**Strong’s 2435 ἱλαστήριον** *hilasterion*

**Meaning:** from *2433* **Origin:** from **ἱλαστήριος** *hilasterios* **Usage:** mercy seat - propitiation

**Notes:** 1 Or *a propitiatory sacrifice -* 2 Or *by -* 3 Lit *because of the passing over of the sins previously committed in the forbearance of God –* 1 John 2:2, 4:10; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:14, 9:28; 1Peter 1:19; Revelation 1:5; Romans 2:4;Acts 14:16, 17:30

**1 John 2:2** and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

**1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

**Propitiation our Work?**

Christ did not leave us any debt to pay or work to complete to gain salvation. Propitiation is the work of God alone. Substitutionary atonement is gifted to all humanity who humble themselves to God. . . thereby, causing Believers to live by His rules and plan for their lives.

Substitutionary atonement is purposely demonstrated in the account of Abraham and Isaac when God provided the ram caught in a thicket (Genesis 22) in substitution for Isaac. We observe that God brought forth the ram (not Abraham or Isaac). In the same way. . . God provided Himself, like the ram, at the Cross in substitution of the sinner (John 3:16).

**Hebrews 10:18-19** 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. 19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

**Basics of Sin to Debt 101**

The commission of sin creates a debt owed to God. Think of restitution in our legal system. It is just innate within humans to see an injustice when someone gets away with a crime and not be held accountable for their wrong committed. The American justice system requires payment for a wrong committed against society or an individual. We hear all the time that a criminal owes a debt to society and/or his victim(s). When that debt is paid (jail time/fine/restitution), there is justice. In capital crimes, the debt can be paid with the criminal’s life. Obviously, the Western judicial system has its roots in the Judeo-Christian code. Within this code. . . at the Cross, God came forward in our place (substitution) and absorbed the penalty for our sin. . . free of charge. For all who surrender in humbling faith to God. . . the efficacy power of the Cross applies to them making them “just” before God.

God does not demand and never has demanded human sacrifice for the payment of sin. We do live with the temporal consequences of our chosen sin.

 The Abraham and Isaac account (Genesis 22) is made to show all humanity that God was not like the pagan god systems where the manmade pagan god demands people sacrifice people/children to appease them. Throwing the maiden into the volcano to appease some made-up god is an example. Or sacrificing children to a pagan god was an abomination to Yahweh/Elohim (1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 3:26-27). Also, God’s chosen people would make human sacrifices against His will (Jeremiah 7:30-31; Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

**Misunderstanding of How God Works**

The case of Jephthah (1129-1123 B.C.) and his daughter is an example of a man who was guided by God in military affairs, but God did not make the vow described in Judges 11:30. Jephthah made the vow which eventually cost his daughter her life. (See Judges 11:29-31.) The text centers on what Jephthah said and did. This vow Jephthah made had nothing to do with reconciling a person’s relationship with God. God did not make, direct, call for or institute the vow that was in direct violation of His Scripture (Torah-Deuteronomy 12:29-31) given to Moses three-hundred and fifty (350) years prior. This account tells us that Jephthah was raised outside of the Israeli community, and he was not a man who was schooled in the Torah (Law). No doubt that his understanding of a relationship with God was tainted due to his upbringing. However, due to his military achievements, he was asked to come back and then led Israel against the enemies.

The Bible details many accounts when Israelites/Hebrews/Jews committed acts that were against God’s commands. King David took it upon himself to have a relationship with Bathsheba. King Saul kept the spoils of war for himself. King Solomon had too many wives. Just because something someone did was recorded in the Bible does not make their actions approved by God.

**Sacrificial-Grace-Act**

The sacrificial-grace-act by God/Jesus/Holy Spirit at the Cross did ‘gift’ reconciliation to anyone (Romans 10:13) who will respond in humility to the conviction of God’s Holy Spirit exampled in Acts 2. Theologians call this gift, to all humble people who come to Him, “General Atonement”. Thereby, through all of God’s work at the Cross. . . is made freely available for everyone to access by their choosing. Therefore, people can achieve peace with God and their neighbor.

**Reconcile & Peace**

 This word “**reconcile**” needs to be understood in the biblical sense. Believers may not use the word often but have an understanding of what it means to be reconciled to God. I know, many people do not acknowledge that they need reconciling to God. But they will have a need to be reconciled to their neighbor at some point in their life. So, how does that work without God? Will there always be a lump in their heart for another where there has been an offense even though they have exchanged condolences? So, there are two aspects or applications to the word ‘reconcile’. One to God and two. . . to neighbor (another person).

 Basically, if a person is reconciled to God, they are saved in the evangelical understanding. If we are reconciled to God then we can be reconciled to our neighbor. The love of God at work in us empowers us to love and reconcile with our neighbor.

**If we can reconcile our relationships then we have peace.**

I see that Paul gives a solid teaching on reconciliation to the Believers in Ephesus. The context of these verses is to explain how and why Jesus’ Cross applies to Gentiles and Jews alike.

**Ephesians 2:12-19** (See also Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 20.)

2:12 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.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Gentiles and Jews] 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;

 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,

**The Incarnation blew-up Satan’s plan to destroy people.**

 Of all things, the Incarnation was not a selfish act on God’s part. God did not and does not demand from fallen humanity any work to gain salvation, that is to be reconciled to Him. In contrast. . . everything Satan does and offers people is centered around selfishness and the “me first” attitude. And by the way. . . Satan is the biggest ego of the “me firsters”.

So, when you are told that you have to perform some meritorious work to gain salvation. . . whatever it is. . . it is not Biblical Christianity. After we are *qualified* (See Sermon July 24, 2022 “Qualified”.) by God through surrendering faith, we our compelled by His Spirit at work in our hearts and minds to accomplish good works.

Who would ever give fallen humanity the idea that they could live peaceful lives with their neighbor and Creator? **God did**. How?

Jesus. . . Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

 God, as Jesus, became one of us in human birth. . . growing-up in our fallen world to face all the challenges of life. Then, God, in human form as Jesus, demonstrated that it is possible to overcome Satan’s offerings of selfishness and pride (Test in the Wilderness – Matthew 4). Remember one of the first declarations Jesus made in the synagogue in his hometown (Nazareth). . . when He stated that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him (Luke 4:18)? Yes, this was an identification with the Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 61:1, and, at the same time, declared that God’s Spirit can indwell a human being and impower their lives to accomplish God’s purposes. Jesus also makes declarations on how a person can inherit the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 5 (Sermon on the Mount). Paul makes another distinguishing statement in Romans 8:9 setting apart a Believer as a Spirit-filled person. From this passage, we can say that there is not any other kind of Christian than a Spirit-filled Christian. This gives us not only the idea but the assurance that we can have peaceful lives with God and our neighbor.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The Incarnation is “the” distinctive difference separating God, as Jesus Christ, emanating His Holy Spirit into Believers’ hearts and minds. . . from manmade religions. Christianity is not manmade. Manmade religions separate their god from people. . .who are viewed as beings to be in constant fear never being able to satisfy the demands of the gods.

 **The essence and goal of the Gospel Message**

**. . . is that fallen humanity needs a Savior**

**. . . and . . . God is the only Being that can and did**

**provide the Cross without cost.**

Anyone who questions or doubts the fundamental need of people’s deliverance from sin and death is in denial of the fallen human nature bent on destruction that is on-going and currently displayed through the modern media at lightning speed in minute-by-minute broadcasts. The modern media conveys the greatest need of fallen humanity. . . that is the need to make peace with God and neighbor. However! A fallen person first has to make peace with God or they will not be able to love and make peace with their neighbor the way God planned for them. Remember, there is an order to the greatest commands. . . that is to love God first and then your neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5, 11:1; Joshua 22: 5; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:27). God loved us first.

**1 John 4:10-11, 19**

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

. . . 19 We love, because He first loved us.

**Colossians 1**

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

having made peace through the blood of His cross;

through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

**AMEN**