**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

 ***God, Our Only Mediator and Judge***

 ***Colossians 2:16-17***

 **October 30th, In the Year of Our Lord 2022**

 **Pastor Matthew Diehl**

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

Read and/or print sermon notes from our website – roundtopchurch.org

 In the previous verses to Colossians 2:16, Paul identifies God as the One who disarmed the rulers and authorities making a public display of them. Scripture declares that God the Father triumphed over the rulers and authorities through Jesus Christ. So, the One who triumphs is the One who judges.

We see God’s judgement throughout the Bible, but the end-time judgement is the judgement everyone is most interested (Revelation 20). There is not any other “being” present to judge in the book of Revelation. The God of creation is the only One to judge the creation. There are not any other gods in existence. Any other entity is a fictional character derived from the fallen mind of man.

So, why should we be concerned about anyone who claims to have control or mediation over our path to salvation or judgement over our eternal lives? Simple. . . we should not. There is not any Scripture identifying any being to judge our spiritual condition for salvation or maintaining our salvation. Paul knows this fact. However, Paul is writing to people who were raised in a pagan world and could be easily influenced by the secular world around them. We have the same situation today. Now, let us read what Paul teaches.

**Colossians 2:16-17**

**16** **Therefore no one is to act as your judge**

in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

**17** things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

**Background Information You Need to Know**

The Jews observed religious rules abstaining from certain foods and observing days. Some of these Jewish Pharisees who had become followers of Jesus. . . still believed and taught that to have a right-standing relationship with God, a person must also keep the Law of Moses which included circumcision.

We need to take into consideration that these disciples of Jesus were Jews. . . in the sense that they grew-up in Judaism and had turned to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They were called by God to spiritually process a new understanding of the meaning and application of the Torah, Writings and the Prophets (Old Testament). Jesus presented corrective understandings seven times in Matthew 5, when He preached the Sermon on the Mount, by saying, "You have heard that the ancients were told . . . but I say to you.”

Therefore, everyone in the early church experienced a seismic shift in understanding God’s plan for their lives within the context of the Old Testament (Torah, Writings, Prophets). This included how to live their daily lives, interact with others, witness the teachings of Jesus and above all have a relationship with God.

We see these transitional conversations and meetings of the leadership in Antioch and Jerusalem recorded in the book of Acts. The Jerusalem meeting took place about seventeen years after Jesus had been crucified on the Cross. And we need to consider that many of the disciples had been on mission trips and were reporting back how they were led by God’s Holy Spirit in witnessing the Gospel Message to both Jews and Gentiles. This was all revelatory to the new group.

**Acts 14: 27-28** 27 When they (Paul, Barnabus) had arrived (at Antioch) and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

With this report, there were Jews present who had turned to follow the teachings of Jesus and they rebuffed Paul and Barnabus saying . . . "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved". Paul and Barnabus then decided that they should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue (**Acts 15:1-2**).

 Once in Jerusalem, they were confronted by more Jews who had joined “The Way”. We read **Acts 15:5-6**.

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." 6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

Biblical historians call this meeting the Jerusalem Council (about 50 A.D.). Here, Peter testified (Acts 15:1-5ff) how God gave His Holy Spirit to “Gentiles” who had not become Jews first or had kept the Law of Moses. As we read in Acts 15, Peter is referring to events at Cornelius’ house (Acts 10).

**Acts 15:7-9**

 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,

"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe”.

8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, **cleansing their hearts by faith”.**

After hearing Paul, Barnabus and Peter. . . **James**, (the son of Mary and Joseph and the brother of Jesus) the leader of the Jerusalem church, made a decision that is recorded in **Acts 15:19ff.**

19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

We can see that James did not make any mention of circumcision or water-baptism to be performed by people in order to gain a right-standing relationship with God. Some Christian leaders, over time, taught that water-baptism replaced circumcision as an entrance mechanism to be required in order to gain a saved-covenant status with God. Again, not any record of Jesus teaching such a requirement. Colossians 2:11-12 is often cited to support this claim.

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

 Briefly. . . the covenant of circumcision God made with Abraham (Genesis 17) was tied to the promise of the land. And the circumcision identified in Colossians 2:11 is accomplished “without hands”. Obviously not a physical act but spiritual.

Consistent with being a spiritual act. . . water-baptism is a symbolic witness making a public statement of faith that a person’s heart had been cut (pierced – Acts 2:37) by God’s Holy Spirit conviction (Rebirth of Spirit – Deut. 30:6; Ezekiel 36; John 3). Therefore, the repentant person had surrendered to God enabling them to receive God’s indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Their confession encompasses the realization that a person’s sin makes them culpable in the need for the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross to pay the debt for their sins. This is the contextual meaning of water-baptism after the Cross.

Note: In the “Hall of Faith” (Hebrews 11), starting with Abel, none of them were water-baptized. All of them were approved by God by their faith. Faith is the prerequisite experience before a person is water-baptized. All the saints in the Old Testament were approved by their faith. Abraham is presented as an example of this truth in Romans 4.

In the Old Testament, water-baptism was not a practice prescribed by God for salvation (and never was). Having a heart circumcised by God to impower a person to keep the commands of God and confessing sin (King David - Psalm 51) is the ongoing “life of faith” a person lives (as evidence) to be in a faith-covenant relationship with God. All this God will do for a person, if they humbly (surrender) ask Him (Ezekiel 36:37). This sounds familiar. Jesus taught that if a person loved Him, they followed His commands (John 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10; 1 John 2:3, 5:3; 2 John 1:6). How could a person live this way. . . waking up every day with the intent to follow the commands of Jesus and not have a heart set on following the ways of the fallen world? This is why God tells us in Ezekiel 36:37 that we have to ask Him to change us. We do not have any power to change (save) ourselves. Nicodemus learned this eternal-life-truth from Jesus in John 3. Unless a person is born again of Spirit, they cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. This is why Paul declares in Romans 8:9 that if the Spirit of Christ is not in a person, then they do not belong to Him.

And those that claimed to follow Him but practiced life in the darkness He said He never knew them (Matthew 7:23). Jude accurately describes these pretenders. (See also 1 John 1:6)

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. **Jude 1:4**

**Back to the Jerusalem Conference**

 If James, the brother of Jesus, a Jew, who had not been a part of Jesus’ ministry and converted after the Resurrection, believed that land-covenant-circumcision had anything to do with water-baptism, or salvation he would have spoken-up.

 **NEXT . . .**

 **Explanation: Contaminated by Idols**

Peter is obviously directing Believers not to be a bad witness by being seen eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Remember, there were many pagan animal sacrifices in the Greek religions conducted at numerous pagan temples. The pagan priest would not burn all the sacrificed animal’s meat on the pagan altar. The Priest would sell the left-over meat to the local markets. Many of these markets and restaurants were next to or part of a pagan place of worship. So, if Believers ate there, they might be seen by others to be a part of the pagan system. Believers did not want to give the witness that you can be a Christian and still participate in pagan religions. This looks familiar to our time. So, many hold themselves out to be Christian and, at the same time, do not turn from their secular life practices. This is particularly true concerning the keeping of amoral relationships.

**Regarding Food and Drink**

God did prescribe dietary laws to the Hebrews during the Exodus in the wilderness (Leviticus 11). These were specific to the Jews. As part of the Law, we see that God prescribed the dietary rules to a very obstinate people in a process to manage them. I see that these dietary rules have some health benefits, but I see the overall application of the Law was used by God to apply a structured disciplined life-practice to a rebellious people. Any person who has experienced a military boot camp realizes that the numerous codes and drills were part of the program that developed people for a higher goal. If the military cannot get a person to keep their barracks and gear clean and in working order then how can they expect someone to keep a nuclear missile system in good working order?

Obviously, God was very clear detailing through New Testament writers that dietary rules were not part of the salvation plan (Mark 7:14-19; Acts 10:9-15; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 8:8; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 9:9-10).

It is unfortunate that millions of Believers have been made to feel guilty and fearful by theStateRoman Catholic Church who instituted “no meat on Friday” to pay homage to Jesus sacrificing His flesh on what has become known as “Good Friday”. I mean, it is like . . . if you do not go along . . . then something is wrong with you. When I was a child going to public schools, we only had fish on Fridays. When I grew-up, I learned that it was the State Roman Catholic Church and its members that pressured the public school system into this practice. Again, a manmade ritual that has nothing to do with your faith, but gives the Roman Bishops and his priests another mechanism to control people by guilt and fear. Just like the Jewish religious leaders made additional rules (613, six-hundred and thirteen) to the Mosaic Law. They used these to theocratically rule over the common person.

**Mark 7:1** The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.

 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

 5 **The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him,**

"Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

 6 **And He said to them**,

"Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

 9 **He was also saying to them,**

"You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';

11 **but you say**, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

**The Keeping of** **a** **Festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath Day**

 **A Point of Clarification:** Believers do not need special days to observe to bring them closer to God or to establish/maintain a right-standing relationship. True. . . we enjoy voluntary/optional special celebrations. For the Believer, every day is a “special day” that we live in this temporal fallen world. My experiences in life have taught me not to wait until Christmas or Resurrection Day to get right with God or closer to Him. With the living God indwelled in our hearts . . . every day is a Holy Day celebrating of our procession into eternal life with our Lord.

**Now with that said. . .**

 Paul makes it clear that these traditions have nothing to do with keeping a right-standing relationship with God. Yes, there were days prescribed by the Law of Moses such as the “Seven Annual Feasts” (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles). Regarding the keeping of the Law with its Holy Days. . . these were never intended to justify a person to God. Remember, the Law was only a guide, a tutor (Galatians 5:24,25) that pointed to the Messiah who could fulfill the Law. I encourage all to read the book of Hebrews. Here are some verses highlighting the essential message in the book. I see that Hebrews 9-10 get to the specific points that highlight God’s intent. Then chapter 11 lists what is called the “Hall of Faith”, starting with Abel, who were all approved by faith hundreds of years before the Law was given. The Law was added due to the hardness of people’s heart (Galatians 3:19-transgressions). Romans 4 is also another New Testament chapter detailing the purpose of the Law and that salvation is through faith. This is God’s plan to reconcile fallen man to Himself from the time of the Fall.

**Hebrews 7:19** (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

**Hebrews 9:11-12** 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

**Hebrews 10:1** 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.

**Hebrews 10: 4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**Hebrews 10:19-22** 19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,

**AMEN**