**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Ekklesia Series***

 ***Cosmic Shift – A Disturbance in The Force***

 **February 3rd, In the Year of Our Lord 2019**

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**(Unless otherwise noted, CSB17 text is quoted)**

The Roman Emperor Constantine had the goal to unite the Roman empire under the Christian faith. His view was to have one statement of faith to bring people together. The political heads were looking to govern under the unity of the Christian faith. They had witnessed over the previous 300 years the durability of Christianity exercised by people who were being fed to wild animals and lit on fire as torches. It is my view that there are mixed results from the government incorporating the Church and its leaders into its governing powers. The Church, by design, is to reside in a person’s heart. There are no meritorious acts to be judged by others to qualify a person’s point of conversion. In time, there was a seismic shift.

What happened after the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. was the eventual merger of State and Church. This did not happen at once. There was a progression over a period of time. In the reign of Emperor Theodosius, who ruled from 378-395 A.D., Christianity was declared THE religion of the Roman state. Prior to that rule, Constantine had made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman state but not exclusively. It was in the Edict of Milan (313) that Constantine declared Christianity a legal religion of the Empire. This provided protection to Church property and its members. There was another previous Edict of Toleration by Emperor Galerius on April 30, 311.

This progressing merger eventually made all other belief systems and practices as being suspect under the watchful eye of the State and Church officials who had become, in effect, agents of the State. This took a few hundred years to develop. Constantine had a view to bind the empire together under the Christian faith. The fact that he did not make Christianity THE religion seems to indicate that he wanted to lead the way in a somewhat voluntary effort. However, after Constantine died, his successors became more and more authoritative regarding people’s allegiance to the empire, being judged due to their allegiance to Christianity, more specifically the State-Church and its officers.

One of the main factors that pulled the Church in Rome into a political position was when Constantine moved the capital of the Roman empire to Byzantium. He changed the name of the city to Constantinople. With the Emperor’s absence from Rome, the political heads in Constantinople looked to rule through the Bishop in Rome for that region of the empire, eventually, to rule through Bishops partnering with local political heads throughout the empire.

**The Impact of the State Endorsed Creeds**

We read the creeds and find that they are appealing. They condense the Gospel to a short, written form of which the State and Church can unite. However, there is huge problem in the cosmic shift of the process and requirements of what it is to be a Believer and who makes that determination. It is not what the creeds said; it is who delivered the message and with what force. Eventually, the shift was from a personal relationship with God (God’s Holy Spirit - H.S.) to man and his State-Church institutions governed by their appointees.

In review, the focus on a person’s personal individual relationship with God/Jesus/H.S. (Triune God) shifted to focus and qualification of a person’s relationship with the State-Church. Eventually, a person needed to be certified through the State-Church to be a Christian, and, in time, everyone was required to be a Christian. A sign of this is seen through infant baptism. In time, the passages in Genesis 17:10-14 for circumcision was used to establish that a child shall be baptized soon after birth.

**State ‘reaches out’ to Church**

We do not forget that it was the State, that is the Roman Emperor Constantine, who called the leaders (Regional Bishops) to Nicaea to compose a statement of faith. This sounds like a good idea, but God’s H.S. was at work in people for thousands of years. From Adam and Abel, we see God working His grace covenant in the hearts of people. After all, it was the State coming to Christianity to save it from destruction and not the other way around. Christians had been persecuted and martyred for years, and the Believer’s Church grew faster and had a more powerful spiritual presence than any other time in history. This is because the Believer’s Church is not of this world and outlives this temporal darkness of sin and death.

America’s founding Fathers knew the value of the state not establishing a religion or church. They saw that the Church should be free to exercise faith and establish its own structures and relationships. They did not want to repeat the horrors of history as chronicled in the Spanish Inquisition or the French Huguenots and other state persecutions.

Huguenots (/ˈhjuːɡənɒt, -noʊ/; French: Les huguenots [yɡ(ə)no]) are an ethnoreligious group of French Protestants.

The term has its origin in early 16th century France. It was frequently used in reference to those of the Reformed Church of France from the time of the Protestant Reformation. Huguenots were French Protestants who held to the Reformed tradition of Protestantism. By contrast, the Protestant populations of eastern France, in Alsace, Moselle and Montbéliard were mainly ethnic German Lutherans.

In his Encyclopedia of Protestantism, Hans Hillerbrand said that on the eve of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, the Huguenot community included as much as 10% of the French population. By 1600, it had declined to 7–8% and was reduced further after the return of severe persecution in 1685 under Louis XIV's Edict of Fontainebleau.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant\_Reformation

First Amendment 12-15- 1791 (Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Over time, through these state sponsored councils, Bishops derived ~~a~~ political power.

**325 Nicaea**………………Condemned Arius

 Denied Jesus as Full deity

**381 Constantinople**….Condemned Appolinarius –

 denied Humanity of Jesus

**431 Ephesus**……………..Condemned Nestorius Bishop Constantinople

Taught Jesus had two separate natures. Mary was not to be called mother of God. Mary was mother of Jesus’ humanity not His Divine nature. Bishops of Rome and Alexandria disagreed that this separated Christ to create a view that diminished His full deity.

 **451 Chalcedon**………….Condemned Eutyches who was a monk near Constantinople

 Eutyches taught that Christ had only one nature, “Divine”, after the incarnation. Bishops of Rome, Leo I and Flavianus of Constantinople disagreed. However, the Roman Emperor sided with Eutyches. Leo of Rome disagreed but could not act against the Roman Emperor Theodosius; an example that the Church was under the command of the State. Theodosius died in 450 and his sister supported Leo and other Bishops. So, in 451 at Chalcedon, Leo had his letter to the council read, “God has spoken through Peter; the fisherman has spoken.” Thus, ushering the Roman Bishop’s claim to have some kind of supremacy over the entire Church. The council produced the teaching that Christ is one person in two natures united, unconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable.

 Leo based his claim due to the tradition of Peter being in Rome that he had no peer and sought that his rule was over the entire Church. The Bishop of Constantinople refused to recognize the Roman Bishop as head of the Church reserving that recognition to Christ. Historical facts show that in the twenty-eighth canon of the Chalcedon council the Bishops of Rome and Constantinople are held as equal. However, there was a

Here is the text of the 28th cannon.

There was a vote by the Bishops of the same holy council

taken in favor of the prerogatives of the throne of the most holy Church of Constantinople.

28th Cannon

Following in every detail the decrees of the holy fathers, and taking cognizance of the canon just read of the 150 bishops dearly beloved of God who gathered under Theodosius the Great, emperor of pious memory, in the imperial city of Constantinople, New Rome, we ourselves have also decreed and voted the same things concerning the prerogatives of the most holy Church of the same Constantinople, New Rome. For the fathers rightly acknowledged [apodedÅkasi] the prerogatives of the throne of the Elder Rome because it was the Imperial City, and moved by the same consideration the 150 bishops beloved of God awarded [apeneiman] the same prerogatives to the most holy throne of the New Rome, rightly judging that the city which is honored by the imperial authority and the senate and enjoys the same [civil] prerogatives as the imperial city of the Elder Rome, should also be magnified in ecclesiastical matters as she is, being second after [deuteran met’ekeinÄn] her.

As for the various prerogatives that the ancient canons ascribe to Rome, these were based on custom sanctioned by conciliar decisions, made - as Chalcedon canon 28 insists - “because it was the imperial city.” In these conciliar decisions, “nothing is said of the pope’s special monopoly of the apostolicity of St. Peter, still less of a vicarship in Rome’s bishops and a universal Pastorate…. The reason assigned for the primacy [was] not ‘Feed my sheep,’ not ‘On this rock I will build my Church,’ but simply old custom and the fact that the city was the imperial city.”

 It valued spiritual unity, in contrast to the Catholic Church, which insisted above all on institutional unity under the jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff. It recognized Christ as the true head of the Church, rather than the pope. https://www.svots.edu/content/chalcedon-canon-28-yesterday-and-today

What is usually called canon 28 (on the honor to be accorded the see of Constantinople) is in fact a resolution passed by the council at the 16th session. It was rejected by the Roman legates.

The context of history sheds light on the situation. Remember that Constantine had moved the capital of the Empire to Byzantine (renamed Constantinople) and during his reign there was a merging of State and Church. In time, the Roman Bishop was used by the central government in Constantinople to govern secular interest. The two cities were viewed as imperial cities; one was “Old Rome” and the eastern city was “New Rome.” The 28th cannon did acknowledge that New Rome be equal with Old Rome and at the same time recognized a second historical position to Old Rome. However, the 28th cannon gave the New Rome Church (at Constantinople) the authority to ordain Bishops in the Empire and provided a list of provinces. http://www.pravmir.com/article\_486.html

Throughout history, the Eastern Churches never have acknowledged the Roman Bishop’s claim to be Pontiff over the whole of Christendom. The Eastern churches officially split from Rome in 1054.

 Schism of 1054, also called East-West Schism, was the event that precipitated the final separation between the Eastern Christian churches (led by the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius) and the Western church (led by Pope Leo IX). The mutual excommunications by the pope and the patriarch that year became a watershed in church history. The excommunications were not lifted until 1965, when Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, following their historic meeting in Jerusalem in 1964, presided over simultaneous ceremonies that revoked the excommunication decrees. https://www.britannica.com/event/Schism-of-1054

 **Cyprian – Bishop of Carthage, North Africa**

The Eastern Church was not the only Bishop to take exception to the Roman Bishop’s claim to be Bishop of Bishops. Many Bishops throughout the Roman world refused to acknowledge the Roman Bishop’s claim. Indicative of the independent authorities is that Cyprian of Carthage held his own councils or synods.

Two synods, in 255 and 256, held under [Cyprian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian), pronounced against the validity of heretical [baptism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism), thus taking direct issue with [Stephen I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Stephen_I), [bishop of Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_of_Rome), who promptly repudiated them. A third synod, in September 256, possibly following the repudiation, unanimously reaffirmed the position of the other two. Stephen's claims to authority as bishop of bishops were sharply resented, and, for some time, the relations of the Roman and African sees were severely strained.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Councils_of_Carthage#cite_note-2)

The Councils of Carthage, or Synods of Carthage, were church synods held during the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries in the city of Carthage in Africa. The most important of these are described below.

**257 A.D.** For no one has set himself up to be bishop of bishops or attempted with tyrannical dread to force his colleagues to obedience to him, since every bishop has, for the license of liberty and power, his own will, and as he cannot be judged by another, so neither can he judge another. But we await the judgment of our universal Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, who one and alone hath the power, both of advancing us in the governance of his Church, and the judging of our actions in that position.

**INFANT BAPTISM**

 The first church council records concerning infant baptism is from the Carthage Council in 257 AD. Church members wanted their children to be under the “Grace of God.” This was their way of showing that status. However, there is not one specific or general reference to infant baptism in the New Testament. Infants and little children have always been under the Grace of God (Mark 10:13-16).

See letter Cyprian wrote.

**To Fidus, on the Baptism of Infants.**

Cyprian, and others his colleagues who were present in council, in number sixty-six, to Fidus their brother, greeting.

http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050658.htm

 **This letter provides detail to support infant baptism. Cyprian lived between 210 -258A.D. The fact that they are discussing infant baptism clearly demonstrates that the practice had been new, and they had to reason from their minds and understanding of the changing world. They did reflect upon the Bible. Thus, this was not a clear practice at that time or prior to their time, and there wasn’t and isn’t any distinct instruction in God’s Word to Baptize infants. They had to extrapolate the reasons. They had a genuine heart and felt the desire to show that infants were under the grace of God. It is my view, as good intended as they were, that God claims all children as coming under His grace in Mark 10:13-16. If there is any text in God’s Word where a whole class of people is claimed by God just because they are members of a group, it is the innocent children.**

Another Council of the 200’s Cyprian

4. Both in the East and in the West the practice of baptizing infants is considered a rule of immemorial tradition. Origen, and later St. Augustine, considered it a "tradition received from the Apostles."[2] When the first direct evidence of infant Baptism appears in the second century, it is never presented as an innovation. St. Irenaeus, in particular, considers it a matter of course that the baptized should include "infants and small children" as well as adolescents, young adults and older people. [3] The oldest known ritual, describing at the start of the third century the Apostolic Tradition, contains the following rule: "First baptize the children. Those of them who can speak for themselves should do so. The parents or someone of their family should speak for the others."[4] At a Synod of African Bishops, St. Cyprian stated that "God's mercy and grace should not be refused to anyone born," and the Synod, recalling that "all human beings" are "equal," whatever be "their size or age," declared it lawful to baptize children "by the second or third day after their birth."[5]

5. Epist. LXIV, Cyprianus et coeteri collegae, qui in concilio adfuerunt numero LXVI. Fido fratri: PL 3, 1013-1019; ed. Hartel, (CSEL 3), pp. 717-721. This practice was particularly strong in the Church in Africa, in spite of the position taken by Tertullian, who advised that baptism of children should be delayed in view of the innocence associated with their age and the fear of possible lapses in young adulthood. Cf. De baptismo, XVIII, 3-XIX, 1: PL 1, 1220-1222; De anima, 39-41: PL 2, 719ff.

<http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19801020_pastoralis_actio_en.html>

In 1 May 418, a minor synod (Augustine of Hippo called it A Council of Africa), which assembled under the presidency of Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, to take action concerning the errors of Caelestius, a disciple of Pelagius, denounced the Pelagian doctrines of human nature, original sin, grace, and perfectibility; and it fully approved the contrary views of Augustine. The synod issued eight canons **[8] Canon II: Infants are to be baptized**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Councils\_of\_Carthage#Synod\_of\_397

**Infant Baptism is another example of man overreaching self-generated authority and failing to see that God’s sovereign grace already covers children.**

 **To be clear, the extrapolated introduction of infant baptism was not instituted by the State-Church. It is clear from reading the documents from councils convened outside of the authority of the Roman Bishop or Imperial authority, reginal Bishops began the practice. However, in time, the State-Church adopted this practice and soon it was a mandatory practice. They failed to see that God through His incarnational ministry teaching made it clear that His grace justified children as we see in Mark 10:13-16.**

**Authority Shift**

 **With this shift to baptizing infants, the men that controlled the Church and then the State-Church claimed authority that sin could be removed through their rituals. They saw themselves as a continuation of the Apostles using their H.S. authority. It is understandable how they developed their view. This group led by Cyprian of Carthage, who were not the State-Church, in fact, rejected the Roman Bishop’s claim to have supremacy over the whole Church. In addition, they could not have foreseen that the State would eventually adopt the Church and its leaders to be used for political control of their holdings. From reading early Church council documents, it is clear that the Bishops viewed their office and position as deriving authority from the Apostles. Scriptural passages like John 20:22-23.**

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been **retained." (See also** Matthew 16:19, 18:18)

 Jesus sent the Apostles under the spiritual authority of the Great Commission; just like you and I are sent. We have the same commissioning. Peter, as we will see later, extends this commissioning to the Priesthood (2 Peter 2:9). **So, ‘in the name of Jesus’** carries the spiritual authority and power breathed into the Disciples (1 Corinthians 5:4). You and I have the same H.S. breathed into us at salvation. This is Baptism of the Holy Spirit, rebirth of Spirit.

 Jesus demonstrated this forgiveness ministry seen in **Mark 2:5,** “Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

 Peter demonstrates Jesus’ commission exactly in **Act 2:38** when he preached a H.S. conviction sermon and the listeners called to Peter, “What must we do.” Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Peter simply told the respondents what God desired. **It was not Peter’s power to which they responded**. They responded to the power of the H.S. working through Peter. Peter didn’t have any authority on his own. The H.S. power can be extended to any Believers. God equips us as He will **(1 Corinthians 12:22).**

 **Acts 10:43** provides an accurate application of Jesus’ forgiveness commissioning. “All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." **This is not through the names of the Apostles or any Disciple**. **It is through Jesus’ name.** As the Church moved forward, Jesus said He would be with them as His Holy Spirit accompanied them.

**Jesus Talks to the Disciples**

**John 14:**16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.

 **It is not their power; it is Jesus’ power and authority being visibly seen in the life-work of all Believers, not just the leaders. Jesus taught the Priesthood of Believers through Peter.**

**1 Peter 2:9** writes to Believers about their commissioning. Peter, of all people, **did not see** that Jesus’ commissioning was exclusive to him and the other eleven. God has Peter write to the church at large when he declares:

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal **PRIESTHOOD**, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

 Paul stands in the synagogue in Antioch and gives a historical account to the Jews. **Paul specifically teaches that it is through Jesus that sins are forgiven.** Acts 13 38 Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man (Jesus) forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you.  39 **and through Him everyone who** **believes is freed from all things**, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

 Peter, in Acts 4:12, does not put his name in front but Jesus’ name. Peter does not put forth a group’s name. Peter does not say that some organization will be created through which all people must go to get saved. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

 **There is very important understanding that all people must see. Peter is not the rock upon which the church is built. Peter never proclaims that he is the stone or the rock upon which the Church is built**. I have preached through Matthew 16:18 previously. The reference to “rock” there is ~~a~~ pointing to Peter’s faith. Another reasonable explanation is that Jesus is pointing to Himself as He talks to Peter. It is also observed that a few verses later Jesus calls Peter by the name of Satan and orders Peter to get behind Him (Mathew 16:23). It is not believable that Jesus founded the Church upon one man, who He then calls Satan.

**BIBLE NOTE**

 It is freeing when you actually read the Bible. Remember, the State-Church intentionally kept the Bible away from the common person. For almost one-thousand years, the Bible of the Roman world was the Latin Vulgate (Jerome 4th 382 commissioned by the Bishop of Rome -  [Damasus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Damasus_I)). The State-Church did not distribute this Latin text to the common person. In fact, they made it illegal to reproduce the Bible. Hence, we see men like Wycliff (1382) translate the Bible into English. He died of ill health before the authorities could make a case against him. However, the State-Church alliances were successful and did burn William Tyndale at the stake (1536) for translating and distributing the Bible in English. Eventually, the monopoly was broken through many State-Church martyrs, and we have the Bible today in many languages. If people know God’s Word, they are free. Once the common person read the Word of God for themselves, they realized that many of the teachings of the State-Church were political and not derived from the Bible.

**Back to Peter**

 Peter raises Jesus’ name as the Stone, the Chief Corner Stone. Peter never claims the Church is founded on himself. He had every opportunity to do so. Peter rejected any teaching that anyone but Jesus is the foundation stone of the Church. 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*. (Acts 4:10-11 NAU)

 **There is the Jerusalem Council** in Acts 15 by which the Apostles and Elders make some administrative decisions. These were not about through whom salvation came. They were about sending missionaries, eating meat sacrificed to idols and circumcision being required.

Act 16:4 As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe.

 We see a sense of responsibility delivered to the leadership and rightfully so. The writer of the book of Hebrews (13:17) directs his recipients to obey their leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over their souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

 **From this verse, we can understand in a singular context how a person can extrapolate that the Apostles were given the authority to forgive sin. However, from other Scripture (James 4:12, 5:9), it is clear that there is only one judge.**

**God’s On-going Corrections**

We know that Jesus came to correct many misunderstandings. A person could not just belong to a community group and be justified by God. I am a Jew and, therefore, I am justified to God. Jesus made clear that the individual person was responsible to God alone. Jesus makes this clear to Nicodemus in John 3.

NAU **John 3:1-16** Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him,

"Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless **one** is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a **man** be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless **one** is born of water and the Spirit **he** cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, **'You** must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is **everyone** who is born of the Spirit."

 9 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"

 10 Jesus answered and said to him,

"Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?

 11 "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.

 12 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe; how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: The Son of Man. 14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

**Numbers 21:8** Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake image and mount it on a pole. When **anyone** who is bitten looks at it, he will recover." The group is not called to look. The individual is.

 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

 16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

**Summation**

Through the first four centuries we see that the personal surrender to God is supplanted over time by the Bishop’s Church and then then the State-Church. The leaders may have been well intended but this shift changed the structure of the path to faith. One of the many voices that placed the Bishop-Church to be the body viewed as The Church was Cyprian of Carthage. He said “No one can have God for his Father, who does not have the Church for his mother.”  Unity was expressed through the agreement of Bishops, who equally are possessed by the Holy Spirit. Each Bishop was [sovereign](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereign) in their own realm. The definition of church shifted to being a Believer united under a regional Bishop. The Scripture regarding Christ as the only mediator appears to have add a layer. 5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

(1 Timothy. 2:5 NAU)

AMEN