**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Sermon Series Ekklesia

*God’s Spirit of Grace – From the Beginning*

February 24th, In the Year of Our Lord 2019

 (Unless otherwise noted, NAS text is quoted)

 Continuing in our sermon series concerning the growth and progression of the Church from the 1st century, we see that there is a deifying resiliency to every effort Satan has to stop, discredit, humiliate, torture and misrepresent God’s intent. We have looked closely at the historical creeds that were State sponsored and proliferated through the Roman then Western societies (including North Africa) and Asia as far reaching as India and north to what we call Russia today, represented by the Orthodox traditions.

 These creeds, as well-intended, were eventually forced in their deployment by State and Church officials. It is not that their content was in error, it is the hand on the sword putting them forth. This forced compliance came in many forms. Nestorius was deposed and exiled. Nestorius was made to return to his monastery at Antioch. Nestorius (386 – 450 A.D.) was Archbishop of Constantinople from 10 April 428 to August 431, when Emperor Theodosius II confirmed his condemnation by the Council of Ephesus on 22 June. So, Conferences were held, and those in opposition were forced to leave office.

 We also see how the Roman Emperor Constantine dealt with Arius after the council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

“In addition, if any writing composed by Arius should be found, it should be handed over to the flames, so that not only will the wickedness of his teaching be obliterated, but nothing will be left even to remind anyone of him. And I hereby make a public order, that if someone should be discovered to have hidden a writing composed by Arius, and not to have immediately brought it forward and destroyed it by fire, his penalty shall be death. As soon as he is discovered in this offense, he shall be submitted for capital punishment...”

— Edict by Emperor Constantine against the Arians

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arius

The Apostles Creed is born first and is the simplest to understand being straightforward in its declarations and brief in its statements. It is prior to the State influencing the Church.

We have looked at the Middle Ages, also referred to as the Dark Ages, being classified in time from the fall of Rome in 476 at the hand of the German tribes.

In September 476 AD, the last Roman emperor of the west, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by a Germanic prince called Odovacar, who had won control of the remnants of the Roman army of Italy. He then sent the western imperial regalia to Constantinople.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/fallofrome_article_01.shtml>

There is debate on the date of the Fall of the Roman Empire. What we see is a progression over time that precipitated the last rule of a Roman Ruler in 476 A.D. as noted previously. See notes following:

Visigoths made several successful incursions into Italy beginning in 401 A.D. and, in the end, under the rule of the Visigoth king Alaric (395–410), sacked Rome. This is often a date given for the official Fall of Rome.

429– 435 Vandals Sack North Africa. Vandals, under King of the Vandals and Alans Gaiseric (ruled 428–477), attacked northern Africa, cutting-off the grain supply to the Romans.

440– 454 Huns Attack. The central Asian Huns led by their king Attila (ruled 434-453) threatened Rome, were paid off, and then attacked again.

455 Vandals Sack Rome. Vandals plunder Rome, amounting to the fourth sack of the city, but, by an agreement with Pope Leo I, they injure few people or buildings.

476 Fall of the Emperor of Rome. Last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, is deposed by the barbarian general Odoacer who then rules Italy.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/fall-of-rome-short-timeline-121196>

 Historians view with the fall of Rome that Western man entered into a Dark Age, because the cultures that followed were not grounded in the Arts and writing disciplines as was the Roman society. This void kept the masses illiterate and thus unknowingly dependent on their leaders. We have seen some production of the Arts and writings from the German cultures but not to the extent of Rome.

 The Church blended into the new cultures by the use of signs and symbols of faith. The era of relics entered.

Constantine appointed his mother Helena as Augusta Imperatrix, and gave her unlimited access to the imperial treasury in order to locate the relics of Judeo-Christian tradition. In 326-28, Helena undertook a trip to the Holy Places in Palestine. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265 – 339/340), who records the details of her pilgrimage to Palestine and other eastern provinces, she was responsible for the construction or beautification of two churches, the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, and the Church of Eleona on the Mount of Olives, sites of Christ's birth and ascension, respectively. Local founding legend attributes to Helena's orders the construction of a church in Egypt to identify the Burning Bush of Sinai. The chapel at Saint Catherine's Monastery—often referred to as the Chapel of Saint Helen—is dated to the year AD 330. In addition, Helena claimed to have found the cross of Jesus and the nails. *See on-line source.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helena\_(empress)

Thus, the Age of Relics was ‘ushered in’ by the State-Church, and we still have their views with us today. Since this time, the claims of relics from the Shroud of Turin to the bones of St. James believed to have been taken to what we know as Santiago, Spain have been viewed by millions. These relics and more have been venerated to the point of a deifying presence. The focus of being blessed by God’s Spirit shifted from the spiritual to the need for pilgrimages to view relics to get healed from sin or illness. Thus, be in the presence of God. God’s presence became limited to locations and State-Church officials.

 As stated before, another reason the term “Dark Age” became in use was the Arts and Writings were retained by the State-Church and were not distributed to the masses. There was over 1,000 years historical policy by the State-Church to retain education to the State-Church elite. To this day, when a person visits Europe, the Magnificent Middle Age Church buildings are adorned in art depicting their version of the story of Jesus Christ. Furthering this policy, we see the Twelve Stations of the Cross eventually developed through which people could worship. The Twelve Stations are good in leading people to think how Jesus suffered. However, they were created because people, for the most part, could not read. Again, the political and religious leaders did not want any competition. The details were filled-in by the State-Bishop and their priest.

**Theological Focus**

An accurate reading of the New Testament reveals that Jesus and the Apostles constantly referred to the Old Testament to support and confirm that they spoke the Truth for God. It is understood that Christianity is called Christianity. It is obvious that the Dark Age State church emphasized their policies from the New Testament. After all, the focus was on Jesus and who He was. The point being that over time the message of salvation became focused as being almost exclusively retained in the New Testament leaving the Old Testament as a reference as to how God used to operate.

Coming forward in time, we do see groups like Jews for Jesus and Messianic Jews. These groups look to the Old Testament and still keep traditions with the observance of certain days from the Law of Moses and other Jewish traditions. These people of faith are pleased with their observances but that does not mean that the keeping of O.T. days is the only way to be a Christian. Paul clearly teaches that one day is not held above another.

Romans 14:5-6 5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

 Again, it is my observation that during the Apostolic Father era (that is the 2nd century) there appears to be more of a focus on the New Testament as compared to the Old Testament.

 This N.T. focus is to be understood since the incarnation, the life of Jesus, the Messiah is chronicled.

 Jews for Jesus has a great web site to view for the account of Old Testament References written in the New Testament.

<https://jewsforjesus.org/answers/jesus-references-to-old-testament-scriptures/>

 Here is a list of 300 citations.

<http://www.bible.ca/manuscripts/List-of-300-Old-Testament-passage-quotes-in-New-Testament-Septuagint-Codex-Vaticanus-LXX-Masoretic-MT-Jewish-Tanakh-Bible.htm>

 **Truth According to Scripture** cites 250 direct quotes -

But wait there is more...

The New Testament writers included approximately 250 expressed Old Testament quotations, and, if one includes indirect or partial quotations, the number jumps to more than 1,000 (referring to all OT books except Obadiah). It is to be noted that the whole New Testament contains not even one explicit citation of any of the Old Testament Apocrypha which are considered as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church. This omission can scarcely be viewed as accidental.

It is clear that the writers of the New Testament were concerned with demonstrating the continuity between the Old Testament Scriptures and the faith they proclaimed. They were convinced that in Jesus the Old Testament promises had been fulfilled.

<https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/bible-study/old-testament-qouted-in-new.php#.XHBUJOhKiiN>

 The point I make is that the validity of the New Testament stands on the Old Testament. The Testaments are seamless. They are interwoven to a spiritual reality that one depends on the other to make God’s complete biblical statement to us.

 In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-47 Jesus literally takes the Hebrews to task on their understanding and application of God’s intent concerning murder/anger, adultery/lust, divorce/still adultery (exception unchastity), false vow/no oath at all: Yes or No, revenge/forgiveness, hate enemy/love enemy. Jesus is scolding them.

 Obviously, there are numerous teaching moments to which we can point. The book of Hebrews is a great book that we shall not forget. The “Hall of Faith” listed in Hebrews 11 starts with Abel. I often refer to this passage, because I believe it should be imprinted in our minds like John 3:16. We had a great discussion at our Wednesday evening Bible study. The outcome is always the same. God loves each and every one of us and has gone to great lengths to save us, if we surrender by faith to Him. It is personal with God. God lists people by name in the Bible who have been approved, made righteous, been justified by Him because of their faith.

**Ezekiel 11:19** I will give them integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh,

**Psalm 51:10** God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

**Ezekiel 18:31** Throw off all the transgressions you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel?

**Jeremiah 24:7** I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God because they will return to me with all their heart.

**John 3:3** Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

**2 Corinthians 3:3** You show that you are Christ's letter, delivered by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

**Ezekiel:20** so that they will follow my statutes, keep my ordinances, and practice them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

**Zechariah 7:12** They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the Lord of Armies had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. Therefore, intense anger came from the Lord of Armies.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love him with all your heart and all your soul so that you will live.

**Jeremiah 31:33** "Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days" the Lord s declaration. "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

**Acts 2:38** (prophesied in Old Testament)

**Zechariah 12:10** "Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and they will look at me whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for him as one weeps for a firstborn.

**Hebrews 10:29** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under-foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?