**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Ekklesia***

***By Faith, The Church is Established in the Beginning***

***The Church is God in Assembly***

***God Incarnated Himself as Jesus***

***Jesus Christ is the Church in the Flesh***

 **December 2, In the Year of Our Lord 2018**

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

Most people do not know the origin of God’s Church or the foundational pillars upon which it is based. Many Christians know that God’s Church is not based upon physical structures or man’s hierarchical structures.

There is also heated debate in the world about which is the oldest church and/or religion. There are three monotheistic faiths in the world. All claim to have the God of the Bible as THE ONE AND ONLY GOD who created our world and people and should be worshipped. Judaism and Christianity are linked together by sharing the Old Testament and by Jewish men (example: Paul, Peter, James, John) who pursued God’s revelation through another Jewish man named Jesus about 2000 years ago. These Jews and others accepted Jesus as the long-anticipated Messiah.

About 600 years after Jesus walked the earth, a man, who history knows as Muhammad, claimed to have a vision from God. This Muhammad formed a military political movement with his claimed vision from his god as a religious catalyst. We know this military political movement today as Islam. From these histories, we can see there is agreement in that there is one God.

One of the differences between these three is that Judaism and Islam deny God could incarnate Himself. It is the miracle of the incarnation that is rejected. They also deny the Resurrection. God came to demonstrate that He can live inside of a person. God can be present inside a person. This is God’s goal to change people. If this does not happen then man is lost. The incarnation was for this purpose and to fulfill the mission of the Cross. Human beings can contain God’s Spirit.

**God created all things including the Church**. The Church starts with God. Remember that God is love (1 John 4:7-12). This passage describes members of the Church of God written most likely after 90 A.D. The Church had progressed for over ~~a~~ half of a century when John writes:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

 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.

 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. (NAU)

Therefore, the Church is the extension of God’s love. God created the love-foundation upon which the Church is built. You can say that God is the first member of His Church. Therefore, the second members are people of faith. The Church is made ~~up~~ of people who by faith surrendered to God’s love and grace. Jesus directly links faith with salvation. An example of this is seen in Matthew 9:22 when Jesus tells the daughter of a woman that her faith has saved her. Paul, in Ephesians 2:8, specifically identifies that faith saves. So, the Church is made of saved people: people who by faith are made acceptable to God and therefore have the love of God running through them. Paul calls the saints who are meeting in Corinth the “church of God.” This is important, because, by Paul using this title, he recognizes that Jesus Christ and God are one in the same.

**Corinthians 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother: **To the church of God at Corinth**, with all the saints who are throughout Achaia.

 **God’s relationship with man started with Adam,** and thus the Church begins. It is the Church of God. The first name of God expressed in Hebrew is in Genesis 1:1 and, as we have noted previously, is in the plural form.

‎ WTTבְּרֵאשִׁ֖ית בָּרָ֣א אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֵ֥ת הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וְאֵ֥ת הָאָֽרֶץ (Gen. 1:1 WTT)

אֱלֹהִ֑ים Eloheem

'elohiym {el-o-heem'} Strong’s # 0430

Eloheem (God) being in plural form obviously denotes Jesus’ presence and that God, the Word and Jesus are one in the same.

 This aligns with **John 1:1-2.**  In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

Follow in verse 14 . . .

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NAU)

The text in John then states that John the Baptist came to make the way for Jesus, The Messiah. Paul writes to Believers in Philippi detailing who Jesus is and connecting Jesus’ human life as an example to theirs. Paul also clarifies that we cannot be equal with God, again the Adam failure, but we are to aspire to conform to Jesus’ human works of a bond servant.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

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

 (Phil. 2:5-8 NAU)

**ADAM**

We read in Genesis how Adam walked and talked with God in the Garden. However, we all know Adam failed in that he chose to reject God’s leadership. So, God had another plan.

**Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.

 The other plan: 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. 22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

**(1 Corinthians 15:21-22).**

Through Adam, Abel is born. Adam’s failure at the Fall demonstrates that man has a choice, and, without God working inside of Adam, he would not have had any choice. God delivered his salvation message to Adam in Genesis 2:17. This is what we do when we come together. We tell people they have a choice; all is not lost; they can choose God in the midst of this fallen world. God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden but made it possible for them to still have a relationship with Him as He wants. We see this choice to have a relationship with God in the lives of the sons of Adam being Cain and Abel. If Cain would have been in proper relationship with God, he never would have murdered Abel. This points to the safety umbrella the Church provides. Theoretically, all who are in the church would never suffer from the effects of pride, rebellion and anger demonstrated in Cain. The love of God working in the hearts of Church members protects mankind from itself.

We know the tragic but revealing account of Cain murdering Abel (Genesis 4). Here is where God demonstrates His salvation plan. Abel had a choice and surrendered to God’s gift of faith and demonstrated his possession of faith through his sacrifice. Faith is the gift from God that saves. Because of Abel’s faith, he is justified and made approved by God. Even though he dies, Abel lives (*By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith. Hebrews 11:4).* His faith lives, and Abel gained eternal life.

 Abel brought his offering to God. Abel was worshipping God with a pure heart. Remember, Abel brought his first-born livestock, and Cain brought his offering in the course of time, that is, when he got around to it. Abel worshiped God with his offering. Abel had church with God. He worshipped God. God loved Abel, and Abel loved God.

**Composition of God’s Church**

 The Church/Assembly/Congregation is made up of two relationship pillars. The first pillar is between God and people. This is why the two greatest commandments start with the call for mankind to love God. The second foundational pillar of the Church is people’s love relationship with each other. God calls for people to have a loving relationship (Matthew 22:36-40). With God working inside a person, this is possible. The Church is designed by God to have a two-way communication. God reaches out to man, and man responds by coming to Him to form His Church.

God reached out through His love to Adam and gave Adam guidelines by which to live. By definition, Adam is a prophet because God spoke to and through Adam to all mankind. Adam’s life speaks to and carries his choices to all of us. God chose to speak to and through Adam regarding our sin nature and how we are able to overcome sin. God gave Adam a choice just like we all have. The simplicity of God’s “choice” is with us today. So, when Hebrews 1:1 declares God spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets, Adam is the first prophet through which God spoke. Hebrews 1:2 links the prophets to Jesus Christ (identified as God’s Son).

**Hebrews 1:1-3** 1 Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways.

 2 In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.

 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**Act 3:21** Heaven must receive him until the time of the restoration of all things, which God spoke about through his holy prophets from the beginning.

 **There cannot be enough emphasis** **on the positioning of Jesus Christ as God’s Son.** The Trinity is one of the most difficult relationships to explain. This is due to the fact that man is limited in his understanding especially of spiritual life. We know all the verses in the Bible that identify Jesus as God in the flesh. 30 "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30; 1:14)

There isn’t any closer relationship that God has designed than a parent and child. From a biblical truth, concerning God and Jesus, they are one and the same. The love and grace brought to us by God incarnating Himself as Jesus Christ gave all humanity the reality that a person in the flesh can overcome sin and death. The statement from the incarnation is that man can contain God. That God, through His will, can exist inside a person. Again, this makes it possible for sin and death to be defeated inside of people. This victory can be achieved by a person surrendering to God and inviting Him into their heart. God knows the sincerity of all. Read John 6 to understand that God knows who people are from the beginning. If God would have come as God, (not in human form like we see in the modern technical movies of our time), then all of us would be left without a path to victory over sin.

 In many modern movies, a god-being comes to earth (Superman) and demonstrates he has powers humans will never have. In these presentations, humans are at the whim of the gods. This is the same as in Greek mythology. The ideas of belief presented through Greek mythology presented man as a “being” that could not contain the same powers as God, like His Spirit, or “a god’s spirit.” This is a product of Plato’s philosophy and seen also in the Gnostics of the 1st century. This Greek thought taught that all matter (including human flesh) cannot contain a pure, wholly good, perfect spirit like a god. Thus, people are on their own and pawns of the gods without any choice. Earth was a playing-field for the gods.

We can never be like God. Adam pursued this fatal quest. However, God gifts us certain abilities that we can use. He created us in His image. This means that we are designed to contain His Spirit to function in us. We move out of the way and allow His Will to operate. The purpose of this is to defeat sin and death. Paul states clearly**Romans 8:1** *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*  2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (NAU)

**Galatians 2:20**

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (NAU)

The Bible teaches that sin must be defeated inside a person. God designed us to have this choice to surrender to His Spirit in order for His power to work in us. This is why John’s Gospel (John 1) addresses God in the Flesh. Thus, with God’s power in us, sin and death can be defeated (Romans 8:1-2). This is basic in understanding Christianity, and how we Believers live life in a fallen world.

**John 17:21** May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.

**John 14:7** If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on **you do know him** **and have seen him**."

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.**

 2 He was with God in the beginning.

 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

**Jesus Is God in the flesh**

**Isaiah 9:6** For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

**Micah 5:2** Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. **His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.**

**John 1:18** No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son,

**who is himself God** and is at the Father's side he has revealed him.

**Faith is the Church/Ekklesia -**

**Abel, the son of Adam, is in a faith relationship with God.**

**Abel is in Church with God.**

**Hebrews 11:1-8 1** Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

 2 For by it our ancestors won God's approval.

 3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did.

By faith he was approved as a righteous man,

because God approved his gifts,

and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

 5 By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God.

 6 Now without faith it is impossible to please God,

since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

 7 By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family.

 By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

**[** Then Noah **built an altar** to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Genesis 8:20 NAU**]**

 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.

 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." **So he built an altar** there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

 8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. **Genesis 12:7-8 NAU**

Abel, Noah and Abram all made sacrifices to God and came to an altar. This is worshipping God. This is what we do when we come together. We bring an offering to God. Psalm 51:17 tells us what kind an offering the Lord seeks.  The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

All of these men were justified and approved by faith to God. People of faith worship God and make offerings to God; they have church with God. Church is people coming to God as individuals (Abel brought his offering) and then corporately they make the body of the Church. Through these lives, we can see that God’s Church has been functioning since the beginning. Thus, the Church has always been here. The names have changed regarding who comes to God for worship. However, the same elements are present. Faithful people bring their offering to God. They pray; they sing; they proclaim God’s Word, and they seek forgiveness.

**Romans 1:15-17**

 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.

**The Church by the Time of Jesus**

By the 1st century A.D., people, specifically the Jews, had been meeting with God for 2000 years from Abraham. We know that prior to Abraham that Abel and Noah are noted to worship God. They worshipped the same way we do. They prayed, brought an offering and proclaimed God’s will in their lives. We have the Bible as a testimony to God’s Will that we proclaim. They sought forgiveness.

 Moses was instructed to build a portable tabernacle so God’s presence would be constantly in front of the people. Inside the tabernacle, God was approached in order to procure forgiveness of sin and restoration. This portable tabernacle was eventually replaced at God’s command by a Temple built on Mount Moriah. The Temple was destroyed twice. The first time by the Babylonians (by 589 B.C.) and the second time by the Romans (70 A.D.). We know the Temple has never been rebuilt. The point being that before the time of Jesus there were people gathering to worship God.

 During the Babylonian exile, the synagogue system was developed. This is important, because our Church system today is based from the Jewish synagogue. This is seen when Jesus goes to the synagogue and reads scripture.

 **Luke 4:14-21**

 14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

 15 And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.

 16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

 18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,

 19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

 20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (NAU)

 We also see Paul go to the synagogues.

Acts 13:14-16

13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: (NAU)

The point being that people were meeting in places of worship or at an altar (Abraham) for 2000 years before God incarnated Himself as Jesus. The shift from the synagogue system to people meeting to acknowledge Jesus as God incarnate came after the Resurrection. The synagogue system met on the Sabbath (Friday sundown to Saturday sundown) according to the Law of Moses. Since Jesus rose on Sunday, the first day of the week, those that acknowledged His Resurrection met to commemorate Him rising from the dead. This new group of Jews and some gentiles acknowledged Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The Jews rejected Jesus, because He refused to be their earthly king who would deliver them from their enemies. In these gatherings, there were prayers, singing, people recounting Jesus’s teachings and the Lord’s Supper. Water Baptisms also took place.

With Jesus’ Resurrection the church took a shift. You can say that there was a church split. Peter’s sermons after Pentecost declared the differences in the two groups. Pentecost was where God spiritually impowered the disciples to preach the truth of God’s Word that the Jews missed and refused to acknowledge. The message of Peter and John and eventually Paul and others is that salvation, that is justification to God, was not through merit, keeping the Law, but by allowing God to circumcise a person’s heart, also known as spiritual baptism, a rebirth (Duet. 30:6ff; Ezekiel 36; John 3; Romans 4). Faith is the keystone in justification. The Jews had misunderstood faith. In fact, they ignored it. This is why Jesus’ first major address in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) declares heaven citizenship. In addition, Jesus corrects the Jewish understanding of God’s Word.

**Matthew 5:20-22**

20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

 21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (NAU)

I am convinced that if Jesus came today as He came two thousand years ago, He would be going to many Christian Churches and telling them the same thing that He told the Jews. You have misunderstood. You have overlaid God’s intent in His Word with your own rules and regulations. You are more interested in institutional rite then God’s righteousness working in your hearts.

The Church of God has always been here. The question is what does man do when he comes and gathers in God’s name. One of the main messages, of what we call the New Testament, is Jesus and His disciples making corrections in man’s understanding and practice of God’s Word stated in what we call the Old Testament.

**John 1:1**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

 2 He was in the beginning with God.

 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (NAU)