**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Ekklesia Sermon Series

*Review from June 9th 2019*

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

*God’s Grace Through the Ages*

February 16th In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS quoted)

Now that we have completed our sermon series on Romans, we will return to our series on the history of the Church, or in Greek, the Ekklesia.

We will go back to the June 9, 2019 sermon to review, because we probably all need a refresher.

The value of knowing what has happened equips us with a ready-witness to how God has interacted with people through the ages. Historians and archeologists are constantly finding  articles, locations and structures that can be verified by the Bible.

But the main value in knowing the history of the Church is to see that God never gave-up on His creation. God is committed to complete the good work that He started in us (Philippians 1:6). God’s grace is always at work.

This sermon series has taken us from centuries before the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ, through the 1st century, and the close of that era with the Apostle John graduating to the glory of the Lord around the end of the 1st century. We then viewed the next generation of saints who furthered the mission of the Gospel. They are called the “Apostolic Fathers”, Polycarp, Ignatius and Clement, to name a few. These men witnessed for the Lord until the day they died. They had an eternal view of life. They never gave-up. Remember, God spoke through Paul in Romans 1.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

With this understanding aligned with the great commission that all authority on heaven and earth resides in the Resurrected Lord, with this power and authority of the Lord, the saints witnessed to a fallen world. The next generation is referred by historians as the Apostolic Fathers. These people risked their lives and many were martyred for their witness. They would not relent or deny the Lord. They would not cease to be the Lord’s witness. With great spiritual encouragement, they went to their public deaths. But they, too, knew they only lost their temporal bodies. They went to be with the Lord, as all the saints have.

We examine the transition (200’s A.D.) led by strong Bishops in North Africa leading the way in establishing that a person’s relationship with God is through the Church and the office of Bishop. Thus, a personal, one-on-one relationship with God was not taught. The beginnings of this shift started before the Roman Catholic Church emerged in the middle of the 5th Century.

We witnessed from the time of Christ through the first quarter century of the 4th century that the Church had grown faster in numbers and geographically then it has since. Through state persecution and cultural rejection, the Gospel is the greater power working in people’s hearts. You most likely have by now embedded in your mind that the Roman Emperor Constantine looked towards the heavens and heard a voice, so he claimed, that under the sign of the Cross he would conquer, and so he did. From that day, the State sought-out the Church through which to govern.

But there is a difference between creating rules and regulations by which to govern and the Gospel of God, of Jesus Christ. Man, and his institutions of government, can control and officiate over the temporal affairs of people, but they cannot baptize people with God’s Holy Spirit and with fire as demonstrated at Pentecost. So, the State-Church called council after council starting in 325 A.D. to write and enforce, via the sword, their State-Church constitutions that held captive the populations of Western civilization for over one thousand years. Except for a few Christian communities in North Africa and east Asia, the State-Church ruled. Their church councils, their Latin Bible, their sword ruled and crushed all opposition.

No doubt that during this time there were sincere Believers within the ranks of the State-Church apparatus. This kept the real Gospel fire going, as God always has a remnant.

Looking at the Gospel being spread by individual effort, we see men like Alfred the Great of Britain (871-901) who had a few books of the Bible translated in the English of his day (Exodus, Psalms, and Acts). Another Brit referred to as Aldred, Bishop of Dunham in 950 A.D., dictated between the lines of the State-Church Latin Bible what is called the Lindsfarne Gospels. There were other individual efforts that cumulatively affected the spread of God’s Word. In time, within the State-Church, men like John Wycliffe came in the late 14th century (by 1382 A.D.) and produced a complete English New Testament that could be read by the common person. These New Testaments were produced by hand. The printing press was not invented until the 1450’s.

After Wycliffe died, his followers produced many copies of his work. These men were called Lollard’s (Babblers) by their enemies and were burned at the stake with a Wycliffe Bible hung around their neck. Through the 1400’s and to the middle of the 1500’s, history records that 1000 Lollards were burned at the stake. However, their work had been done; the Bible in the common language of the English person was available to read. Eventually, others translated. Even though Wycliffe translated from the Latin Bible, it was still received. It was not until 1516 with the publication of Erasmus’ Greek New Testament did people have an opportunity to translate from the original language the New Testament was first written. Now all the Reformers of Europe could work to produce their native-tongue Bible from a source outside the State-Church Latin Bible.

Through the martyrdom of saints like Jan Huss (1415 Czech theologian) and William Tyndale (1536 Englishman) and others, God’s Word advanced, and, in time, people made their own decisions about what to believe. This did not happen all at once or in the same country. This was not the age of mass communication when everyone watched the six-o-clock news. No, no, but ‘the cat was out of the bag’. There wasn’t any turning back. With this release of God’s Word, in time, came different opinions. Now that the State-Church had lost its clothes and was completely exposed, people turned to others.

History dictates that when one power departs another steps-in and takes its place. By in large, the population, the common man of Europe, as they say, could not read. This placed the interpretation, publication and reading of the Bible in the hands of a few people in each national community. Within these groups, strong educated men emerged with their own understanding of God’s Word. The State-Church wasn’t there any longer to tell them what to think and what to teach. They produced their own narrative. The State-Church became fractured. Every nation had leading personalities. Most people know of a few of these men like Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Geneva. The Swiss Reformation began in 1519 with Ulrich Zwingli. Henry VIII of England can be included with this group for breaking from Rome. All of these had their own issues with the Roman State-Church. Some shared the same concerns but all did agree to break from the authority of the RCC.

Reviewing the events of the 1500’s, there were hundreds of individual groups that carved-out their own understanding and, therefore, beliefs from their own personal reading of the Bible. Some saw water-baptism as mandatory for salvation and others did not. Some saw the need for the State-Church, be it their own nationality church like Henry in England. Or some set-up a theocracy as Calvin did in Geneva and ruled with an iron fist.

Michael Servetus a Spaniard, physician, scientist and Bible scholar, suffered a worse fate. He was Calvin's longtime friend who resisted the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. However, he angered Calvin by returning a copy of Calvin's Institutes with critical comments in the margins. The next time Servetus attended Calvin's Sunday preaching service on a visit, Calvin had him arrested and charged with heresy. The 38 official charges included rejection of the Trinity and infant baptism. Servetus pleaded to be beheaded instead of the more brutal method of burning at the stake, but Calvin and the city council refused the quicker death method.

On October 27, 1553, Calvin’s men used green wood for the fire so Servetus would be slowly baked alive from the feet upward. For 30 minutes he screamed for mercy and prayed to Jesus as the fire worked its way up his body to burn the theology book Calvin had strapped to his chest as a symbol of his heresy. How could such torture be condoned? In November 1552, the Geneva Council declared Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion to be a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Disagreeing with Calvin’s view of God was a violation warranting the death penalty according to the way John Calvin interpreted Leviticus 24:16.

http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/john-calvin-had-people-killed-and-bad-bible-interpretation-justified-it

There were many leaders like Calvin and his city council who condemned people to death for not agreeing with them. As the 16th and 17th centuries continued, development in Christian communities took their ups and downs depending on who the local leaders were. This affected people in Europe and America. Those who came from Europe dissenting or protesting their European overlords arrived in America with their own version of religious-Christianity. As we have noted previously, it was not until the establishment of the state of Pennsylvania (1701 - Charter of Privileges) was there a state that people could freely live-out their Christian faith as they individually chose.

The account of Roger Williams is a good illustration of the struggles a person encountered by following their own conscious.

Roger Williams https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger\_Williams

(c. 21 December 1603 – between 27 January and 15 March 1683) was a Puritan minister, theologian, and author who founded the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. He was a staunch advocate for religious freedom, separation of church and state, and fair dealings with American Indians, and he was one of the first abolitionists.

Williams took holy orders in the Church of England in connection with his studies, but he became a Puritan at Cambridge and thus ruined his chance for preferment in the Anglican church. Williams knew that Puritan leaders planned to migrate to the New World. He did not join the first wave, but he decided before the year ended that he could not remain in England under Archbishop William Laud's rigorous administration. He regarded the Church of England as corrupt and false, and he had arrived at the Separatist position by the time that he and his wife boarded the Lyon in early December, 1630.

After a time, Williams decided that the Plymouth church was not sufficiently separated from the Church of England. Furthermore, his contact with the Narragansett Indians had caused him to question the validity of the colonial charters that did not include legitimate purchase of Indian land. Governor Bradford later wrote that Williams fell "into some strange opinions which caused some controversy between the church and him".[15] In December 1632, Williams wrote a lengthy tract that openly condemned the King's charters and questioned the right of Plymouth to the land without first buying it from the Indians. He even charged that King James had uttered a "solemn lie" in claiming that he was the first Christian monarch to have discovered the land. Williams moved back to Salem by the fall of 1633 and was welcomed by Rev. Samuel Skelton as an unofficial assistant.

Finally, in October 1635, the General Court tried Williams and convicted him of sedition and heresy. They declared that he was spreading "diverse, new, and dangerous opinions" [16] and ordered that he be banished. The execution of the order was delayed because Williams was ill and winter was approaching, so he was allowed to stay temporarily, provided that he ceased publicly teaching his opinions. He failed to do so, and the sheriff came in January 1636, only to discover that he had slipped away three days earlier during a blizzard. He traveled 55 miles through the deep snow, from Salem to Raynham, Massachusetts where the local Wampanoags offered him shelter at their winter camp. Their Sachem Massasoit hosted Williams for the three months until spring.

Williams was expelled by the Puritan leaders from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for spreading "new and dangerous ideas", and he established the Providence Plantations in 1636 as a refuge offering what he called "liberty of conscience".

In 1638, he founded the First Baptist Church in America, also known as the First Baptist Church of Providence. He studied the Indian languages and wrote the first book on the Narragansett language, and he organized the first attempt to prohibit slavery in any of the American colonies

Williams wanted his settlement to be a haven for those "distressed of conscience", and it soon attracted a collection of dissenters and otherwise-minded individuals. From the beginning, a majority vote of the heads of households governed the new settlement, but only in civil things. Newcomers could also be admitted to full citizenship by a majority vote. In August 1637, a new town agreement again restricted the government to civil things. In 1640, 39 freemen (men who had full citizenship and voting rights) signed another agreement which declared their determination "still to hold forth liberty of conscience".

Thus, Williams founded the first place in modern history where citizenship and religion were separate, providing religious liberty and separation of church and state. This was combined with the principle of majoritarian democracy.

**First Great Awakening**

History tells us that even though men like Roger Williams and William Penn came along the vast majority of “Churched” Christians still practiced a very liturgical faith. The idea that belonging to a particular group and adhering to their leader’s teaching was the path to salvation and the retention of salvation was prevalent. Thus, the time of the First Great Awakening came in the early part of the 1700’s. Historians view that there are at least four Awakenings in American history. All of these have their particular personalities aflame.

**First Great Awakening leaders** (c. 1730–1755) George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennant, John & Charles Wesley

**Second** **Great Awakening Leaders** (c. 1790–1840) Charles Finney, Barton Stone, James McGready, Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher

Camp Meetings started. This movement was not limited to but saw heavy Methodist and Baptist participation. Also, men like Joseph Smith claimed special revelations from God and established the Mormon Church.

**Third Great Awakening** (c. 1855–1930) Social Gospel movement, Postmillennialism, Mary Baker Eddy & Christian Science, Charles Taze Russel & Jehovah’s Witness, Salvation Army, Holiness Pentecostal Movements

**Fourth** **Great Awakening** (c. 1960–1980) This time is still being evaluated as to its impact. Among others, Billy Graham led the way, even though Graham started in the late 1940’s. This was a push-back against humanism, atheism and secularism by Christians who hold the Bible to be the Word of God and infallible regarding God’s Message of salvation and His plan for human life. It is my view that this is on-going. What is new?

**Fifth**? When people’s spirit responds adequately to God.

The First Great Awakening (sometimes Great Awakening) or the Evangelical Revival was a series of Christian revivals that swept Britain and its Thirteen Colonies between the 1730s and 1740s. The revival movement permanently affected Protestantism as adherents strove to renew individual piety and religious devotion. The First Great Awakening marked the emergence of Anglo-American evangelicalism as a trans-denominational movement within the Protestant churches. In the United States, the term Great Awakening is most often used; while in the United Kingdom, it is referred to as the Evangelical Revival.

**New Changes**

Building on the foundations of older traditions—Puritanism, pietism and Presbyterianism—major leaders of the revival such as George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards articulated a theology of revival and salvation that transcended denominational boundaries and helped create a common evangelical identity.

Revivalists added to the doctrinal imperatives of Reformation Protestantism, an emphasis on providential outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

Extemporaneous preaching gave listeners a sense of deep personal conviction of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ.

The preaching fostered introspection commitment to a new standard of personal morality.

Revival theology stressed that religious conversion was not only intellectual assent to correct Christian doctrine but had to be a "new birth" experienced in the heart.

Revivalists also taught that receiving assurance of salvation was a normal expectation in the Christian life.

**Division from the Established Churches**

In Europe, while the Evangelical Revival united evangelicals across various denominations around shared beliefs, it also led to division in existing churches between those who supported the revivals and those who did not. Opponents accused the revivals of fostering disorder and fanaticism within the churches by enabling uneducated, itinerant preachers and encouraging religious enthusiasm. In England, “Evangelical Anglicans” would grow into an important constituency within the Church of England, and “Methodism” would develop from the ministries of Whitefield and Wesley.

In the American colonies, the Awakening caused the Congregational and Presbyterian churches to split, while it strengthened both the Methodist and Baptist denominations. It had little impact on most Lutherans, Quakers and non-Protestants.

Evangelical preachers "sought to include every person in conversion, regardless of gender, race, and status." Throughout the colonies, especially in the South, the revival movement increased the number of African slaves and free blacks who were exposed to and subsequently converted to Christianity. It also inspired the creation of new missionary societies, such as the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792.

**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.**

**Jonathan Edwards 1741**

Excerpt: They deserve to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way, it makes no objection against God's using his power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Luke xiii. 7. The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their heads, and it is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's mere will, that holds it back.

3. They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. John iii. 18. "He that believeth not is condemned already." So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place; from thence he is, John viii. 23. "Ye are from beneath." And thither he is bound; it is the place that justice, and God's word, and the sentence of his unchangeable law assign to him. KJV

**John 8**:**23** And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

**Isaiah 45**:**22** "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

**First Great Awakening (see Wikipedia)**

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\_Great\_Awakening**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Great_Awakening)

**Below are excerpts.**

**Events in continental Europe**

Historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom sees the Great Awakening as part of a "great international Protestant upheaval" that also created pietism in the Lutheran and Reformed churches of continental Europe. Pietism emphasized heartfelt religious faith in reaction to an overly intellectual Protestant scholasticism perceived as spiritually dry. Significantly, the pietists placed less emphasis on traditional doctrinal divisions between Protestant churches, focusing rather on religious experience and affections.

Pietism prepared Europe for revival, and it usually occurred in areas where pietism was strong. The most important leader of the Awakening in central Europe was Nicolaus Zinzendorf, a Saxon noble who studied under pietist leader August Hermann Francke at Halle University. In 1722, Zinzendorf invited members of the Moravian Church to live and worship on his estates, establishing a community at Herrnhut. The Moravians came to Herrnhut as refugees, but under Zinzendorf's guidance, the group enjoyed a religious revival. Soon, the community became a refuge for other Protestants as well, including German Lutherans, Reformed Christians and Anabaptists. The church began to grow, and Moravian societies would be established in England where they would help foster the Evangelical Revival as well.

While known as the Great Awakening in the United States, the movement is referred to as the Evangelical Revival in Britain. The revivalist tradition had existed in Scottish Presbyterianism since the 1620s. The Evangelical Revival, however, first broke out in Wales. In 1735, Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland experienced a religious conversion and began preaching to large crowds throughout South Wales. Their preaching initiated the Welsh Methodist revival.

In England, the major leaders of the Evangelical Revival were brothers John and Charles Wesley and their friend George Whitefield, who would become the founders of Methodism. They had been members of a religious society at Oxford University called the Holy Club and "Methodists" due to their methodical piety. This society was modeled on the collegia pietatis (cell groups) used by pietists for Bible study, prayer and accountability. All three men experienced a spiritual crisis in which they sought true conversion and assurance of faith.

Whitefield joined the Holy Club in 1733 and, under the influence of Charles Wesley, read German pietist August Hermann Francke's Against the Fear of Man and Scottish theologian Henry Scougal's The Life of God in the Soul of Man. Whitefield wrote that he "never knew what true religion was" until he read Scougal, who said that it consisted of becoming a "new creature". From that point on, Whitefield sought the new birth. After a period of spiritual struggle, Whitefield experienced conversion during Lent in 1735. Afterwards, he was ordained a priest in the Church of England, but he always maintained a willingness to work with evangelicals from other denominations. In 1737, Whitefield began preaching in Bristol and London, and he became well known for his dramatic sermons, which were reported on by the press.

In February 1739, Whitefield began open-air field preaching in the mining community of Kingswood, near Bristol. He learned this method from Howell Harris, who had been successfully field preaching in Wales. Within a week, he was preaching to crowds of 10,000. By May, he was preaching in London to crowds of 50,000. While enjoying success, his itinerant preaching was controversial. Many Anglican pulpits were closed to him, and he had to struggle against Anglicans who opposed the Methodists and the "doctrine of the New Birth".

Whitefield wrote of his opponents, "I am fully convinced there is a fundamental difference between us and them. They believe only an outward Christ; we further believe that He must be inwardly formed in our hearts also. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." In August 1739, Whitefield left England to begin his preaching tour in the American colonies.

In 1736, John Wesley was returning to England from a failed Anglican mission in Georgia when he came into contact with members of the Moravian Church led by August Gottlieb Spangenberg. The Moravians' faith and piety deeply impressed Wesley, especially their belief that it was a normal part of Christian life to have an assurance of one's salvation. Despite being an Anglican priest, his encounters with the Moravians led him to conclude that he was in need of conversion himself. He developed further contacts with the Moravians in London and became friends with Moravian minister Peter Boehler who convinced him to join a Moravian small group called the Fetter Lane Society.

In May 1738, Wesley attended a Moravian meeting on Aldersgate Street in London where he felt spiritually transformed during a reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley recounted that "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Wesley understood his "Aldersgate experience" to be an evangelical conversion, and it provided him with the assurance of his salvation that he had been seeking. Afterwards, he traveled to Herrnhut and met Zinzendorf in person.

By March 1739, Whitefield was ready to launch his preaching tour in the 13 Colonies but wanted someone to continue the revival preaching at Bristol. He turned to Wesley who was at first uneasy about preaching outdoors, which violated his high-church sense of decency. Eventually, however, Wesley changed his mind and, in his own words, "submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation". On April 2, 1739, Wesley preached to about 3,000 people near Bristol.

**How did the First Great Awakening affect America?**

The same way it did in England and Europe. The more the Word of God came into the hands of the common person like the Moravians and a few State-Church preachers like Whitefield and the Wesley’s who allowed the Holy Spirit to move in their hearts and minds the more people responded. Remember, the shift back in the 200’s A.D. when the Bishops in North Africa began to establish that they were the Church. Without a Bishop, there wasn’t any Church is what Cyprian said. This moved the relationship between God and man to the side. It was replaced by placing the man-made Church as the mediator between people and God. The Reformation basically removed the State-Church to be replaced by other smaller State-Churches. Luther was tied to the German political authorities. In England, many protestant leaders were still tied to the political leadership.

So, in the initial Reformation, there was a partial movement away from a liturgical process of religion. The acceptance that God asked for a surrender to a deep personalization of His Holy Spirit was maturing in the populace in America and Europe.

This is why I see, even today, that we are still in a process called Reformation. There are millions, yes, hundreds of millions of people who consider themselves Christians that are dependent upon the liturgical process of religion.

We continually go back to the simplicity of God Gospel Message through Jesus Christ. God in the flesh could not have been clearer. The lawyer asked Jesus how to gain eternal life. We, here, in our group, have reviewed this ‘Jesus encounter’ many times.

**Matthew 22:35-40**

35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.

39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

**John 14:15-21**

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

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.

20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."