**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Seismic Shifts***

 ***Believer’s Church to Bishop’s Church to State-Church***

***Focus Verse Colossians 2:12***

 **October 9th, In the Year of Our Lord 2022**

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

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 It is most unfortunate that western education does not teach a historical foundation to western civilization. If you even know that you need to know. . . most people do not know the questions to ask. So, today’s sermon is a peek into the first few centuries of the Christian Church to highlight what took place and how and why certain religious practices came to be. . . such as infant baptism.

 A preliminary remark is in order relating to the “Fall of Man” and pride. It is evident, by the witness of the Biblical record and life experience, that fallen humanity cannot leave well enough alone. Or. . . “if it *ain’t* broke don’t fix it”. But NO. . . “everything” has to be messed with. When God, as Jesus, “The” crucifying Christ, proclaimed from the Cross “it is finished!”(John 19:30). . . all humanity should have been relieved. But NO again! The pride of fallen man has to be in charge . . .everything has to go through us.

 God’s simple plan of salvation purposely leaves fallen humanity out of the equation. He knew they would royally mess things up. It is well known that the Jews extrapolated from the Law God gave Moses, hundreds of more rules that weighed the people down. Jesus told the religious leaders . . .

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:23).

 History proves that all mankind lacks in the fulfillment of justice, mercy and faithfulness. With this said, let’s get started.

**Where is a good place to start?**

Let us start with Augustine of Hippo (North Africa) 354- 430 A.D. (a philosopher and theologian) who was one of the most influential men of the early church. He wrote volumes of papers and letters that the Church references to this day. One of the issues Augustine wrote concerned original sin. Basically, and in the vernacular. . . all people are born with the sin of Adam in their genes and, thus, are doomed to hell. With this view. . . the seed of sin is transferred biologically through conception. This is commonly referred to as the “Seminal theory of Original Sin”. So, the question is . . . how can this “doomed to hell” be averted? Simply. By the power Jesus Christ invested into His Church. . . this “seed of Adam” can be removed by water-baptism at birth. But infant water-baptism can only be performed by Church officials. . . namely Bishops and priests. To be fair to Augustine. . . the view that the Church and its officers alone possessed the authority to perform functions of the Church, like removal of original sin, took hold before his lifetime. However, we see many people in the New Testament go and make disciples (Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos and more).

 Original sin is also the reason that the Roman Bishop (Pius IX) in 1854, with his Bull Ineffabilis, solemnly proclaimed the dogma of the “Immaculate Conception” concerning Mother Mary. The reasoning was that original sin could have never been in the body of Mary. . . for she is the mother of Christ who is sinless. And therefore, Mary never physically died but ascended to heaven . . . for the price of sin is death. Thus, declared Pope Pius XII in 1950.

 Be advised that the Roman Catholic Church has four authorities (Church Councils, Infallible declaration from the Pope, Traditions, and lastly. . . the Bible.

 **Note the “immemorial tradition” is their authority for their teaching. Here is an exert from their teaching on. . . INSTRUCTION ON INFANT BAPTISM**

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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." 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. 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."

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

 Whoa, it all ties into a theocratic system of governing people through fear and guilt, and the Church has the remedy in their ritual formula’s infant water-baptism to remove original sin. Let us look at a leading Church leader that called for infant baptism.

**Independent Bishops**

TheRoman Catholic Church makes their claim that the Christian Church was founded by Peter and Paul in Rome. . . is based upon tradition only. However, a simple review of the facts refutes this false claim.There is no record of Peter or Paul founding the church in Rome. When Paul wrote his letter (Book of Romans) he states that he had not been to Rome (Romans 1:9-15). And there is no record of Peter establishing the church. In fact, the first church is in Jerusalem, with Jesus’s brother, James, as the first pastor. “and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). James, as the head elder, presided over the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. When I pressed Catholic scholars to prove that Paul and Peter founded the Church in Rome. . . I was told it was their tradition. They proved no evidence because there is no evidence. And with this false clam made by Leo, hundreds of years after the Incarnation, we see bishops functioning independently but with mutual agreed upon understandings concluded at councils.

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

Prior to Leo’s (Rome’s Bishop) claim in 451 A.D. that he was the head Bishops of all Bishops. . . the other Bishops in Christendom held their own independent councils or synods, such as Cyprian of Carthage (North Africa). In time, (The Great Schism in 1054 A.D.) the Eastern Church in the Roman Empire with its capital in Constantinople (Old Byzantium) broke from the Western Church and the self-proclaimed Pope. The historical record proves that many Bishops throughout the Roman world refused to acknowledge the Roman Bishop’s (Leo) claim in 451 A.D.

Indicative of the historical independence of Christian Bishop’s there were two synods, in 255 and 256 A.D., held under [Cyprian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian) of Carthage. The synods 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 then promptly repudiated Cyprian. A third synod, held by bishops of North Africa and the East (September 256, A.D.) unanimously reaffirmed the position of the synods of 255 and 256 A.D. And with this reaffirming. . . the other Bishop’s are seen to reject Stephen's claims to authority as bishop of bishops, and, for some time, the relations of the Roman and African bishops were severely strained.

We can see the historical record of the Councils/Synod of Carthage, held during the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries in the city of Carthage in Africa. Here is a quote from one of these illuminating the fact that Christian Bishops saw themselves as independent.

**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.

 With this independence we see an early church council in Carthage, North Africa recorded infant baptism 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 (Luke 18:15; Mark 10:13-16). There is not any command (Scripture) to baptize infants.

 Prior to the Carthage Council in 257 A.D., we have record of a letter Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (North Africa) wrote **“To Fidus, on the Baptism of Infants”.**

 At a Synod of African Bishops, 253 A.D., Cyprian the Bishop of Carthage 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."

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

 In this letter there is also a reflection upon God’s covenant with Abram in Genesis 17. Genesis 17 is the account of God making a covenant with Abram. This is when God changed Abram’s name to Abraham (v. 17:5). In addition, God established the covenant sign to be male circumcision (v. 10-14) "And every male among you who is eight days old “(17:12). To provide a short explanation. . . water-baptism (which is gender inclusive) was chosen to replace male circumcision as the covenant sign. And like circumcision was to be on the eight day.

 **Cyprian’s letter, cited in part above, provides detail into the mindset of the early church leaders to support infant baptism. Cyprian lived between 210 -258 A.D. The fact that they are discussing infant baptism clearly demonstrates that the practice had become a pressing issue over time but there was not any Scripture directing them. They had to reason from their minds and understanding of the changing world. They extrapolated from their own reasoning outside of Scripture to formulate a statement on infant baptism. They had a genuine heart and felt the desire to show that infants were under the grace of God. We know the infant mortality rate was very high and parents wanted to know where their babies went after death. The infant death rate in the Roman empire was 30% in Cyprian’s time. And about half of all children died before they reached adulthood. (**<https://ourworldindata.org/child-mortality-in-the-past>**)**

 **However, Scripture is clear that God claims all babies/children as coming under His grace in Luke 18:15-17; 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 infants and children.**

 **In refutation of infant baptism**, there were other voices of which we have records from the first few centuries. We can see that infant baptism was a practice particularly strong in the Church in Africa, despite 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. Tertullian writes in his book about Baptism in about 170 A.D. He was a theologian who lived in Carthage.

It may be better to delay Baptism; and especially so in the case of little children. Why, indeed, is it necessary -- if it be not a case of necessity -- that the sponsors too be thrust into danger, when they themselves may fail to fulfill their promises by reason of death, or when they may be disappointed by the growth of an evil disposition? Let [children] come, then, [when] they grow up...; let them become Christians when they [are] able to know Christ! Why does the innocent hasten to the remission of sins? https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/the-first-baptist-theologian-t.php

**Another Witness for Infant Baptism**

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’s overreaching self-generated authority and failing to see that God’s sovereign grace already covers children. This is why. . . I came to the conclusion that religion is man’s attempt to be God or create a path/mediate to God. It is clear through historical observation that mankind cannot leave God’s work alone. Jesus said, “It is finished!”, at the Cross (John 19:30), meaning that no person has to do a meritorious work to gain right-standing with God. And there are numerous verses clearly stating that by no works can we be saved or that people can save themselves. . . Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 4, as examples.**

 **To be clear, the 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, regional 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 Luke 18:15-17.**

**15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them.**

 **16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**

 **17 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." (See also 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. . .Their Bishop’s Church. They saw themselves as a continuation of the Apostles using their Holy Spirit 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. You can say that before the State-Church was in place, the “Institutional” or Bishop’s Church and their synods/council proclamations governed. Objectively, 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 and members. 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 alsoMatthew 16:19, 18:18)

 We have reviewed this passage previously, and, in the correct entire biblical context, all Believers are commissioned to witness the forgiveness of sin or the witness to a person that their sins are not forgiven because they do not surrender to God.

 Jesus commissioned the Apostles under the spiritual authority of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); just like you and I are sent. We have the same commissioning. The task of making additional disciples was not exclusive to the twelve disciples. Again, we see Timothy, Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila, Stephen, Phillip and many more working under the power of the Holy Spirit as evangelists. The authority to spread the Good News was not exclusively commissioned to the initial twelve disciples and Paul.

 Peter demonstrates Jesus’ commission exactly in **Act 2:38** when he preached a Holy Spirit 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 Holy Spirit working through Peter. Peter didn’t have any authority on his own. God’s Holy Spirit power can be extended to any Believer. God equips us as **He** wills **(1 Corinthians 12:11).**

 **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 lifework 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 not through any act of man.**

**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. Nor does Peter 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."

 **This a very important understanding that all people must see. Peter is not the rock (The name) that saves people or the person 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. Some see that the reference to “rock” is pointing to Peter’s faith. Another reasonable explanation is that Jesus is pointing to Himself as He talks to Peter. And in the Old Testament the reference to “rock” is a direct reference to God. It is also observed that a few verses later Jesus calls Peter by the name of Satan and orders Peter to get behind Him (Matthew 16:23). It is not believable that Jesus founded the Church upon one man, who He then calls Satan. I wrote a sermon detailing these verses that provides a biblical understanding. (See Sermon on Christian Fellowship Web site “Christ – Head of the Heaven and Earth Church” Colossians 1: 15-18 - July 31, 2022)

**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 was commissioned in 382 A.D. 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.

**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. Example: “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**. Jesus’ response to Nicodemus addressed the individual and not group-salvation. And only the Spirit of God can rebirth a person spiritually.

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."

**Summation**

Through the first four centuries, we see that the personal surrender to God (The Believer’s Church) is supplanted over time by the Bishop’s Church and then the State-Church. The leaders may have been well-intended, but this shift changed the structure of the path/mediator leading to salvation. We have seen in this study that 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.” Therefore, salvation came through the Church we can call the Bishop’s Church. Unity was implemented through the agreement of Bishops at synods, who considered themselves equal. Each Bishop was [sovereign](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereign) in their own realm. The definition of Church shifted from a single person as a Believer (The Believer’s Church) to members being united under a regional Bishop and his rules. The bishops and their synod-decrees ruled. “The Scripture regarding Christ as the only mediator appears to have added a partner. . . The Bishop”. And with this addition, practices like infant water-baptism developed. Bishop’s saw themselves as the mediator who could remove sin by their religious acts.

 **For there is one God,**

 ***and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus.** (1 Timothy. 2:5)

 **AMEN**

 **Additional Notes Preached from Previous Sermons**

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. . .0 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 to qualify a person to be a Christian.

What happened after the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. was the solidification of the merger of State and Church. This did not happen at once. There was a progression over a period of time. After Constantine made Christianity legal (Edict of Milan 313 A.D.) it soon became “THE” religion of the Roman State excluding all others. This took place during the reign of Emperor Theodosius, who ruled from 378-395 A.D. Due to the Roman state taking management of the Church. . . the Church members and property came under its protection. There was another previous edict of Toleration by Emperor Galerius on April 30, 311. Just prior to these edicts the Church was severely persecuted under Diocletian in 303–304 A.D.

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 years to develop its full impact upon Western civilization. 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. But Constantine desired to define Christianity by council creeds. . .hence we have the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D. which he summoned all the Christian Bishops. So, Christian came to be defined by state creeds. After Constantine died, his successors, like Theodosius became more and more authoritative regarding people’s allegiance to the empire, being judged by their allegiance to Christianity, more specifically the State-Church and its officers.

In time the bishop’s office in Rome grew to become a powerful political office for the Western Roman Empire. One of the main factors that pulled the local 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’s office in Rome for that region of the empire. Eventually, the state ruling through Bishops became the status 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 seismic shift of the process and requirements of what it is to be a Believer and who makes that determination. It is not so much 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 officers.

In review, the focus on a person’s personal individual relationship with God/Jesus/H.S. (Triune God) shifted to from the Believers Church to focus and qualifying a person’s relationship with the State-Church. They became the mediator between God and people. Eventually, a person needed to be certified through the State-Church to be a Christian, and, in time, depending on the leadership. . . everyone was to be a Christian in the Roman Empire or Holy Roman Empire. Over time the pivotal sign of a person being brought into the Church was required through infant water-baptism.

**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 Holy Spirit had been 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 and the State-Church.