

*Assembly  
Versus  
Kingdom*



*A Collection of sermons preached by  
W. E. Best*

Distributed Freely by:

*Spring Assembly of Christ*

<http://springassemblyofchrist.org>

October 2014

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# *Assembly Versus Kingdom—Part 1*

W.E. Best

The true understanding of Jesus Christ and His assembly is obtained from the New Testament, not from denominational institutions. A creed is like the sky painted on canvas. The sky painted on canvas is a ceiling beyond which the human eye does not wander. Outside the art gallery, there is a different sky which seems to recede forever. The sky painted on canvas is something to be looked at; the sky of nature is something to be looked through. Therefore, it behooves every Christian to view Christ and His assembly in the unlimited creeds of men.

When one seeks to understand Christ and His assembly in the light of the restricted creeds of men, it leads to subjectivism and arrogance. When one memorizes the creed, he thinks he has arrived. On the other hand, when one recognizes that he is the servant of the limitless sky of Divine truth, he is humbled at the feet of the infinite message of God. There is a straight line to the conclusion of God's eternal purpose, but one approaches the conclusion by stages. The guide allows the elect to take circuitous routes by roads that come to an end, from which we return with an important lesson which we have learned. Let us not overlook the men whose names were mentioned, beginning with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist could present God's message, but he could not enable the people to receive the message which was foreordained. God alone can enable the ones given to Christ before the world began. John the Baptist stood on the threshold of a new day. Israel had been without a message for four hundred years, and Jesus Christ was coming for the first time. To find out how bad things were, read Malachi 2:1-9. Malachi gives a special message to spiritual leaders. The priests were to be disciplined. Even today, how many church members really take the message of God to heart?

The Biblical outline for the Gospels is found in Philippians 2:5-11—"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The progress of the gospel message from Jewish Matthew through Gentile Mark to Gentile Luke parallels the three stages of expansion in the Acts of the Apostles. First, the Gospel is preached within the confines of the Jews (Acts 1-7). It then spread through Samaria, reached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and finally, reached the household of Cornelius (Acts 8-12). Through the missionary travels of Paul, the Gospel is propagated freely and fully to the whole Gentile world (Acts 13-28).

The genealogies of our Lord form an important link in the comprehension of the kingdom. Matthew presents Christ as the rightful Heir to Abraham's "land" and David's "throne." Neither the land nor the throne can be interpreted typically or symbolically, but must be understood as being literally and actually covenanted to the Heir.

In the study of prophecy, there is a return to the beginning, and such is the case in the study of Revelation. God's first thoughts are His last, for He is Himself "the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17). He is the living God, who abides to carry out His purpose according to His own unchanging nature. Thus, it is no wonder if, when we reach the end to which Revelation bring us, we find that we are once more contemplating the beginning. The beginning is now seen from the end; as indeed, when we look closely into it, we find that the end was seen from the beginning. Revelation, therefore, is Genesis enlarged and glorified.

It is foolish for us to think that there would be order at the beginning, but there would be no order at the conclusion. The mystery of prophecy is not what God will do, but that He delays to do it, from our perspective—"But to the wicked God says, What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes" (Ps. 50:16-21).

Jesus Christ's perfect human nature cannot be denied. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near....BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen....When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me saying, Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1:1-3, 7, 17, 18).

In John's message to Philadelphia, he said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you" (Rev. 3:7-9).

Many arguments can be given to show the difference between the assembly (church) and the kingdom, but the foundation of them all is the diversity of the mediating work of the Holy Spirit in the assembly (Rom. 8:26, 27) and the unmediating reign of Jesus Christ in the kingdom. The assembly and kingdom can be equated no more than imperfection and perfection, or the believer in his perishing body and his glorified body.

The idea of a present kingdom and authority exercised by men on earth is not too far from Roman Catholic teaching. They say the church is God's visible kingdom on the earth, and some non-catholics say the church is God's invisible kingdom on the earth. While Roman Catholics claim authority is invested in the Pope, most non-catholics say authority is given to all believers in the church. Therefore, both Roman Catholics and non-catholics see the kingdom already existing, but in different forms. The idea that saints already possess the kingdom, with its authority, has led to all kinds of heresies and extravagant claims of authority and fanaticism among Roman Catholics and non-catholics alike.

Some think the kingdom is present in a limited sense. Their proof text is Matthew 6:10—“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.” The following are some of the various interpretations of “Your kingdom come”—

1. This is a spiritual kingdom. The prayer has for its object the spread of the gospel and its saving reception.
2. The kingdom is twofold: (a) universal and (b) particular. One is power, and the other is grace. Now, this kingdom of grace is God's church militant; and in the future, it will be the church triumphant in heaven.
3. The kingdoms of grace and glory are but one and the same kingdom, distinguished into two parts, which differ in five circumstances: (a) In time, one is present, and the other is future. (b) In place, one is on earth, and the other is in heaven. (c) In condition, the church is triumphant and destined for glory. (d) In order, grace in time is triumphant, and then comes glory eternally. (e) In the mantle of government, grace is entered before we can enter heaven. In the manner of government, grace is governed by subordinate means of ministers and ordinances in time, and glory is governed immediately by God.
4. The kingdom can be regarded in three ways: (a) In one sense, the kingdom has already come (Luke 11:20). (b) The kingdom is here at this moment in the hearts of those who submit to Him. (c) The day is yet to come when the kingdom has been established on the earth.

We will parse parts of two verses of Scripture, in order to give additional help, in answering those who have twisted a great doctrinal subject. Christ said, “...you are Peter [Petros, masculine, a stone], and upon this rock [petra, feminine, large rock] I will build [‘I shall continue to build,’ progressive future active indicative of the verb oikodomeo] My church [feminine, ‘assembly’]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it [feminine, ‘her’]. I will give [future active indicative of the verb didomi] you

the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind [aorist active subjunctive of the verb deo] on earth shall have been bound ['shall have already been bound,' future perfect passive participle of the Greek verb deo] in heaven, and whatever you loose [aorist active subjunctive of the verb luo] on earth shall have been loosed ['shall have already been loosed,' future perfect passive participle of the Greek verb luo] in heaven” (Matt. 16:18, 19). No keys have been given to the assembly that Christ is continuing to build.

The most heretical statement I have ever tried to read on Matthew 16:19 is as follows: “We control heaven and bind hell. It is up to us, not up to God. Things start on earth and end in heaven.” The King James Bible says that God’s action in heaven is contingent upon what Peter and his successors do on earth. That is wrong. Things start in heaven and conclude on earth.

## *Assembly Versus Kingdom—Part 2*

W.E. Best

The visible aspect of the assembly is not the reality of the assembly any more than our understanding, experience, and interpretation of God's love is the perfect reality of God's love. Thus, the visible aspect of the assembly is not swallowed up in the invisible, and the invisible is not swallowed up in the visible.

Surely, no one would be foolish enough to say Christ's Divine nature was swallowed up by His human nature. It has been said that we are already becoming what we are becoming, and still, we are as yet becoming what we really are. Therefore, God's "assembly" and "many assemblies" does not mean a dual actuality. The unity of Christ's assembly, which is His body, cannot be affected by the ignorance, inconsistency, and sin of her members. Thus, the disorders in the Corinthian Church did not affect the unity God gives. Paul said to the Ephesians, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

Disorders affect the fellowship, but not the unity of Christ's assembly. Heresies contribute to the manifestation of the unity of the assembly. The unity which is imperfectly manifested now will be completely manifested in the kingdom. The degree of its manifestation in the present is determined by the degree of spiritual growth.

We must not overlook the threefold work of Christ in regard to the assembly He is building. The threefold work of Jesus Christ consists of the following: (1) "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25); (2) "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:26); and (3) "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27).

Nothing can be more wonderful than God's threefold protection of His chosen ones—past, present, and future. The same principles typified by Adam and Eve are seen operating between Christ and His assembly. As soon as the declaration was made that Adam should not be alone, we are told about the operation. From a rib, God made woman for the man. Moreover, as soon as the assembly was announced, the foundation upon which she is continuing to be built was proclaimed. The only thing remaining is her presentation to Christ for the consummation of the marriage. Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (II Cor. 11:2). At that time, the perfect "Bride" will be given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

The assembly is neither visible nor invisible only, because she is both. If we were to say the assembly is wholly visible, it would be like saying Christ is purely human. As the

human nature of Christ is the only manifestation of God, the local aspect of the assembly is the only manifestation of the invisible principle of life. Therefore, both Christ and His assembly are mysteries of the world. Christ said, "...I will build My church..." (Matt. 16:18). What about the institutional "churches" that hire people to come and help increase their membership? Scripture says, "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

Roman Catholics say, "The church teaches infallibly when it defines, through the Pope alone, as the teacher of all Christians, or through the Pope and the bishops, a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by all the faithful..." (Baltimore Catechism, Page 73). Infallibility in the Roman Catholic Church is claimed by continuity in the Pope as the Vicar of Christ. Thus, the Pope is the church's infallible guide, according to their publications. On page 64 of the New Baltimore Catechism and Mass, the Holy Catholic Church is illustrated as follows: (1) Christ is the invisible Head of the church at the right hand of God; (2) The Pope—successor of Peter—is the Head of the church; (3) All bishops are successors of the apostles; (4) Priests are pastors; (5) Brothers and Sisters; and (6) Laity. Underneath this pyramid are all other Catholics and the text, Matthew 16:18—"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

The whole argument of the Roman Catholic Church is based on their view of the promise given to Peter in Matthew 16:18 and 19. This should cause each Christian to scrutinize the history of Peter. All judgments and decisions are to be made on the basis of what God has said, and not on the basis of what the Roman Catholic Church is saying. Where is the final seat of authority? It is not human reason, because that is subjectivism. It is not subjectivism, because that is Roman Catholicism. There is no revelation given above that which is written. The Holy Spirit guides, but not in the formulation of doctrine which might be superimposed upon the Word of God.

The only true testimony is the inspired (God-breathed) word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Immediately after Peter's good confession, Christ announced His suffering. Christ asked the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). Three names were mentioned—John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. Christ said, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Christ said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17).

Immediately after Peter's confession, Christ announced His suffering. "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke [epitiman, present active infinitive of epitimao, meaning rebuke, censure, speak seriously, or warn] Him, saying, God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to You" (Matt. 16:21, 22).

Peter's good confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), was followed by a false statement, "This shall never happen to You" (Matt. 16:22). It



cannot be denied that Peter set himself up as a guardian of Jesus Christ, and that is the reason he rebuked the Son of God. However, his self-appointment as guardian became the object of a rebuke from Christ. Christ said, "Get behind Me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23). His self-appointment as a guardian also resulted in a rebuke for going to sleep (Matt. 26:40-46).

Paul rebuked Peter because he was wrong (Gal. 2:9-21). Does this sound like infallibility? The decision was not made on the basis of papal authority. Furthermore, Peter recognized what he was when he refused undue reverence and homage on the part of Cornelius. "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I too am just a man" (Acts 10:25, 26). It is sad to say, but very few cases like this in an assembly turn out like this one did.

All judgments and decisions are to be made on the basis of what God has said, and not on the basis of what the Roman Catholic Church is saying. This applies to all churches of all denominations. The only true Vicar of Christ is the Spirit, who, like Him, is absolutely and unqualifiedly the Spirit of truth. Christ told the disciples, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:26, 27). Christ also told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth. He said, "In that day you will not question Me about anything" (John 16:23).

There is no inner light or revelation given above that which is written. Individual revelation is without a standard. The Spirit guides, but not in the formulation of doctrine which might be superimposed upon the word of God. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the nature of authority is invested in the Apostles being united to Peter, their declared pastor and head. Thus, the infallibility of the Roman Catholic Church resides in the Body of Bishops, the successors of the Apostles in communion with the Pope, the successor of Saint Peter.

The assembly (church) is not the kingdom, but we do have the relation of the assembly to the kingdom. The most common interpretation read or heard today is that the "church" of Matthew 16:18 is the "kingdom" of God on earth of Matthew 16:19. This calls serious questions and meditation on the following questions and statements:

1. Is "kingdom" a synonym for assembly?
2. Can "flesh and blood" inherit the kingdom?
3. Does prophecy predict a kingdom between the first and second advents?
4. Does Matthew 16:18 and 19 distinguish between the assembly and the kingdom?
5. The kingdom will not come until the assembly is completed.
6. Was it the assembly or kingdom that was removed from the Jews?
7. If the assembly was the kingdom, the saints would be reigning now.

# *Assembly Versus Kingdom—Part 3*

W.E. Best

The second lesson closed with a brief quote and a giant correction in Matthew 16:19—“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” The King James Bible translates it as follows: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Equal authority on earth and in heaven should say something to every Christian. According to the KJB, this means there is perfect identity between human and Divine judgment. This is impossible in imperfect Christians. If Christians could do that, there would be no need for sanctification (I Thess. 4:1-12). Look at the close example of this in Matthew 18:15-20—“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Also read I Corinthians 5:1-13.)

After Matthew 16:19, Peter was thinking of the kingdom. He had to learn there were things that preceded the kingdom. Knowing the disciples would become discouraged “because of the way” (the way of life, the way of the Christian, the way of the Lord), Christ gave them a foretaste of the kingdom. Hearts saddened by suffering are gladdened by glory.

Observe the outline of events in Matthew 16:13-28—

1. The Father revealed to Peter the truth about Jesus Christ.
2. The Son revealed to Peter the truth about the assembly.
3. The assembly prepares for the kingdom.
4. Peter had to learn what preceded the kingdom.
5. Suffering, death, and resurrection were foretold.
6. The path of self-denial is the Christian way of life.

7. Christ's second coming is not only foretold, but a foretaste is experienced—the transfiguration.

Men know no more of Christ than they value and esteem in Him. (Read Matthew 16:13-20.) If the Christ means no more than “anointed to save sinners,” as many teach, why were the disciples charged to “...tell no one that He was the Christ” (Matt. 16:20)? It is not the Divine Sonship that constitutes “the Christ”—although an essential element—and it is not the Davidic Sonship that constitutes Him “the Messiah”; but it is the two inseparably united that makes Him “the Christ.” Thus, it is this anointed seed of David who will be identified with the kingdom. Now we understand the secrecy. It was the time for the office of Kingship to be announced. Peter could not understand this; therefore, the Lord gave Peter, James, and John a manifestation of Christ's Kingship. Peter called the transfiguration scene “...the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (II Pet. 1:16). When Peter wrote his two epistles for the purpose of strengthening the brethren, he said, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Pet. 1:19-21).

Christ foretold His death and resurrection, which constituted the purpose of His Body being proclaimed. The assembly is purchased by Christ's death and prepared for the kingdom. Peter said, “...YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY. If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (I Pet. 1:16-21).

There is no doubt to anyone that Peter needed preparation for both the assembly and the kingdom. He was motivated by the Spirit one moment to speak the truth, and a few minutes later, he was motivated to speak against the purpose of God. Strange surgings in the apostle manifested themselves.

The way of Christ is the way of suffering. What was true of Christ is true for His followers, but not to the same degree or purpose. Christ suffered for the sins of the elect, but the chosen ones suffer because of their own sins. As elected ones, we suffer because of our sins committed in the sphere of sanctification. Christ suffered for righteousness' sake; Christians also suffer for righteousness' sake, but not to the same purpose or degree as the impeccable Savior. Peter had to be taught the cost of discipleship. He was reasoning like man, because he was reasoning in terms of expediency. He must cease listening to the reasoning of Satan and accept the wisdom

of God. Christianity can never be made popular. It always calls for self-denial and self-sacrifice. True happiness lies not in oneself, but in God alone.

Jesus Christ gave the disciples—Peter, James, and John—a foretaste of the kingdom. Christ personally appeared in His Kingly glory. The dead saints—Moses and Elijah—were personally present in their glory. The living saints—Peter, James, and John—personally beheld and admired the majesty and splendor of the scene. Thus, the preview of the kingdom cannot apply to the assembly, because of its connection with the second advent. The disciples were charged to keep it a secret until after the resurrection. Coming down the mountain, Christ said, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (Matt. 17:9).

The transfiguration was both a reality and a representation of the future advent of Christ. The vision is given to encourage all saints, who are heirs of the kingdom, to share with Christ His reproach while we wait for the glory of the kingdom. Note the following:

1. Sinai—Moses led Israel back to God.
2. Carmel—Elijah led Israel back to God.
3. Calvary—Christ’s decrease shall be accomplished at Jerusalem.
4. Olivet—Christ’s glory will be displayed on the Mount of Olives at the second advent (Acts 1:11; Zech. 14).

As John was the forerunner of Christ’s first advent, Elijah will be the forerunner of His second advent. Malachi said, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal. 4:5, 6).

Those who believe the kingdom is the assembly hold the idea that John fulfilled the mission of Elijah, but what about John’s own testimony? Did John know who he was? He said, in his gospel, “They asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? And he said, I am not. Are you the Prophet? And he answered, No. Then they said to him, Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? He said, I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD, as Isaiah the prophet said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? John answered them saying, I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:21-29).

## *Assembly Versus Kingdom—Part 4*

W.E. Best

Jesus Christ gave the disciples—Peter, James and John—a foretaste of the kingdom. The two saints that had passed out of time into eternity—Moses and Elijah—experienced a foretaste of the kingdom. The Son of God personally appeared in His Kingly glory (Matt. 16:27-17:13), and His majesty and splendor were admired by men from both eternity and time.

The preview of the kingdom cannot apply to the assembly, because of its connection with the second advent of Christ and His kingdom. Therefore, the disciples were charged to keep it a secret until after the death and resurrection of Christ. He said, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ” (Matt. 16:19, 20). “As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the son of Man has risen from the dead. And His disciples asked Him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? And He answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist” (Matt. 17:9-13).

The transfiguration was both a reality and a representation of the future advent of Christ. The vision is given to encourage all saints who are heirs of the kingdom to share with Christ His reproach while we wait for the glory of the kingdom. As John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ’s first advent, Elijah will be the forerunner of His second advent (Mal. 4:5, 6).

The King James Bible says that God’s action in heaven is contingent on what Peter and his successors do on earth. However, the Greek text says the opposite. “And I am also saying to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I shall continue to build (progressive future active indicative of oikodomeo) my assembly, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower her. I shall give (future active indicative of didomi) to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatever you may bind (aorist active subjunctive of deo) on the earth shall have already been bound (periphrastic future perfect passive participle of deo) in the heavens, and whatever you may loose (aorist active subjunctive of luo) on the earth shall have already been loosed (periphrastic future perfect passive participle of luo) in the heavens” (Matt. 16:18, 19—translation of Greek text). The verb about which there has been much debate is called the periphrastic future perfect. There are three places—Matthew 16:19; 18:18; and John 20:23—where this inflected form is used, and its use has buried the Arminians.

If the King James Bible contained the correct rendering of the Greek periphrastic future perfect, the doctrine of sacerdotalism would be established. The King James Bible clearly says that God's action in heaven, whether it be to bind or loose, is contingent upon the actions of Peter and those who succeed him. The fact is that men have nothing to do with the sovereign God, who has chosen who will be saved. Furthermore, the Son of God redeems only the persons chosen by the Father. Coming to the Holy Spirit, no Christian can fail to see and acknowledge that it takes all three Persons of the Godhead to accomplish salvation. The Father elects some; the Son pays the sin-debt of the chosen; and the Holy Spirit applies what the Son of God has done on behalf of the chosen ones.

The assembly is neither visible nor invisible only; she is both. If we were to say the assembly is wholly visible, it would be like saying Christ is purely human. As the human nature of Christ is the only manifestation of God, the local aspect of the assembly is the only manifestation of the invisible principle of life.

Both Christ and His assembly are mysteries to the world. The Greek word kosmos is a noun used nearly 200 times in a variety of meanings. It is used more by John in his five books and letters than any of the other apostles. It is used to describe the universe, the earth, inhabitants of the world system—good or bad, world affairs, etc. Check the following verses to get the idea—John 1:10-13; 29; 3:16; 15:19; II Corinthians 5:19; and I John 5:19.

It is the responsibility of God's people to search the Scriptures for their defense against the apostasy of the last days. For example, the Roman Catholic Church of our day teaches that she is infallible to her people. Page 65 of McGuire's New Baltimore Catechism and Mass says, "Sovereign Pontiff, he has the highest place and greatest authority (power) in the Church—the Pope, Our Holy Father.... The birthday of the Church was Pentecost Sunday (fifty days after Christ's Resurrection). On that day, the Holy Ghost began to dwell in the church and thereby give it life. He will stay with it until the end of time. This is why the Church is able to teach, to sanctify, and to rule its members as Christ wished it to do. Christ is the invisible (cannot be seen) Head of the Church. He is personally represented now on earth by our Holy Father, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the visible (can be seen) Head of the Church. The apostles were the first bishops of the Church. But Saint Peter was the chief of all the apostles. Christ made him the first visible head of the Church, and the chief teacher and ruler."

All judgments and decisions are to be made on the basis of what God has said, and not on the basis of what the Roman Catholic Church is saying. Where is the final seat of authority? It is not human reason, because that is subjectivism. The only true Vicar of Christ is the Holy Spirit, who like Him, is absolutely and qualifiedly the "Spirit of Truth." Christ said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26).

The following quotes are given for the purpose of showing what students of Scripture are facing today:

Augustus Hopkins Strong—"Protestants err in denying reference in Matthew 16:18 to Peter; Christ recognizes Peter's personality in the founding of his kingdom. But Romanists equally err in ignoring Peter's confession as constituting him the 'rock.' Creeds and confessions alone will never convert the world; they need to be embodied in living personalities in order to save; this is the grain of correct doctrine in Romanism. On the other hand, men without a faith, which they are willing to confess at every cost, will never convert the world; there must be a substance of doctrine with regard to sin; and with regard to Christ as the divine Savior from sin; this is the just contention of Protestantism. Baptist doctrine continues the merits of both systems. It has both personality and confession. It is not hierarchical, but experiential. It insists not upon abstractions, but upon life. Truth without a body is as powerless as a body without truth. A flag without an army is even worse than an army without a flag."

Phillip Brooks—"The truth of God working through the personality of man has been the salvation of the world."

Pascal—"Catholicism is a church without a religion; Protestantism is a religion without a church. Yes, we reply, if church means hierarchy."

J. Vernon McGee—"What are the keys of the Kingdom of heaven? Were they given only to Simon Peter? No, Jesus gives them to those who make the same confession made by Peter, those who know Christ as Savior. If you are a child of God, you have the keys as well as any person has the keys. The keys were the badge of authority of the office of the scribes who interpreted the Scriptures to the people (see Neh. 8:2-8). Every Christian today has the Scriptures and, therefore, the keys. If we withhold the Word, we 'bind on earth'; if we give the Word, we 'loose on earth.' No man or individual Church has the keys—to the exclusion of all other believers. We have a responsibility today to give out the gospel because it is the only thing that can save people. This is a tremendous revelation. Who is sufficient for these things? You and I have a responsibility that is awesome indeed! 'Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ' (Matt. 16:20). The Lord made this request because the mere knowledge of who He is will not save you. To find salvation you must know who He is and what He did and accept Him by faith." (See page 49 of J. V. McGee's work on Matthew.)

The absolute must for the sincere Christian is to be diligent and unbiased in the study of Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:15-20. Many arguments can be given to show the difference between the assembly and the kingdom, but the foundation of them all is the diversity of the mediating work of the Holy Spirit in the assembly and the unmediating reign of Jesus Christ in the kingdom.

The idea of a present kingdom and authority exercised by men on earth is close to the teaching of Roman Catholics. The assembly and kingdom can be equated no more than imperfection and perfection or the believer in his perishing body and in his glorified body. Furthermore, some Catholics say that the church (assembly) is God's invisible

kingdom on earth, while others say the church (assembly) is the visible kingdom on earth.



## *Assembly Versus Kingdom—Part 5*

W.E. Best

Read again the passage we have been studying over the past few weeks—Matthew 16:13-17:13. The controversy today is this—many believe the kingdom and the church (assembly) are one. I do not believe this. Before we begin our review and study, I want to read something from Jonathan Edwards entitled “Get Thee Behind Me, Satan” (In New England, page 357). “And though we read that Christ once turned and said unto Peter, on a certain occasion, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan’; and this may seem like an instance of harshness and severity in reproving Peter; yet I humbly conceive that this is by many taken wrong, and that this is indeed no instance of Christ’s severity in his treatment of Peter, but on the contrary, of his wonderful gentleness and grace, distinguishing between Peter and the devil in him, not laying the blame of what Peter had then said, or imputing it to him, but to the devil that influenced him. Christ saw the devil then present, secretly influencing Peter to do the part of a tempter to his master; and therefore Christ turned him about to Peter, in whom the devil then was, and spake to the devil and rebuked him. Thus the grace of Christ does not behold iniquity in his people, imputes not what is amiss in them to them, but to sin that dwells in them, and to Satan that influences them.” The most important words in this article are “distinguishing between Peter and the devil in him.” Read Roman 7:14-17. Do you always do what you would like to do? When you let the devil in, you do things you shouldn’t do. He is the greatest deceiver of all.

The assembly is not the kingdom, but we do have the relation of the assembly to the kingdom. Paul speaks of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. He said, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints [holy ones], and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

If Peter had been the first head of the assembly, each member would have had to say, “I am of Cephas.” This means that Paul’s admonition would have had to be different than what he stated in I Corinthians 1:12 and 13—“Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

A diligent and unbiased study of Matthew 16:18 is an absolute must for the sincere Christian. First, Christ introduced His work—“I also say to you that you are Peter.” The first word is not kai, the word for “and”; but the first word is kago, meaning “I also,” “I likewise,” or “in like manner.” Since Christ is on the level with God the Father, He is saying, “I in turn will reveal to you what the assembly is that I am going to build, just as the Father revealed to you who I am.” “My Father is working until now, and I Myself

[kago] am working” (John 5:17). “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also [kago] loved you, abide in My love” (John 15:9).

Peter’s confession was commended by Jesus Christ, because it came from a spiritually illuminated mind. Spiritual affections spring from the beauty of Divine things. Their beauty is discerned through the illumination of the renewed mind. Furthermore, Christ could congratulate Peter because He knew Peter had discerned through the illumination of his mind, and that view alone produces the conviction of their reality. Spiritual things have the influence of reality only on renewed persons.

The error of identifying the kingdom with the assembly is serious. No keys are committed to the assembly for use in this age. The keys are for use in the kingdom, and it is fallacy to say they are used in the assembly. The assembly is built by Christ; it is not built with keys by men. Since the assembly is in the process of being built, it is not the time for Christ’s “appearing and His kingdom” (II Tim. 4:1).

Those who spiritualize the kingdom, by denying its literal and visible aspects, are guilty of Docetism in regard to the kingdom. Docetism was an early religious doctrine that believed Jesus Christ appeared to men in a spiritual body, but since the time of His death, He only seemed to suffer and die.

If believers by entering the assembly already enter into the promised kingdom, where is the distinction between the two? Augustine said, “The Church (assembly) could not now be called His Kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven, unless his saints were even now reigning with Him”—quoted from *The Theocratic Kingdom*. The idea that saints now possess the kingdom has led to all kinds of heresies and extravagant claims of authority and fanaticism. Both Roman Catholics and Mormons are good examples.

The assembly must be perfected in order to reign with Christ over the nations. The completed and perfected assembly will have a place of special honor in the coming kingdom. Does not the perfect future indicative, which denotes a state of completion, harmonize with the completed and perfected assembly that shall reign with Christ? Listen to Paul for a few minutes before you make a decision as to where you stand. “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already

sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it” (Rom. 8:16-25).

The binding and loosing will be in harmony with the perfected state by Christ’s “appearing and His kingdom” (II Tim. 4:1). It is a fact that in the purest period of the local aspect of the assembly’s history, it had a mixture of people who did not have the Spirit of God. There was a Judas among the apostles, a Simon among the first converts, and a Demas and Diotrefes among the first servants. Therefore, the only way the local assembly could be sure of heaven’s approval of her judgments on conduct was when there was agreement in the Spirit of prayer. No prayer and condition of agreement will be needed in the kingdom, but they both are needed in our imperfect state. It takes both the standard of heaven and the Spirit of prayer to keep us from acting arbitrarily in our imperfect condition. However, it will be impossible for the completed and perfected assembly to act arbitrarily in the kingdom.

The foundation of the assembly is stated negatively—“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church [assembly]...” (Matt. 16:18). Negatively, it was not Peter, because he was only a man—“...I too am just a man” (Acts 10:26); he was a sinful and mortal man (Matt. 26:74); he interprets and expounds the prophecy given by Isaiah (Is. 28:16; I Pet. 2:6-8); and Peter could not be an unwavering foundation against Satan’s assaults.

Positively, Jesus Christ is the only unshakable foundation for the assembly. Therefore, the Father revealed to Peter, “And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE, and A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed” (I Pet. 2:4-8).

As the Father selected no other, because there was no other to fill this position with His qualification, Jesus Christ was more than man; He was and will forever be the God-Man. Paul said, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11). Even Augustine said, “It is not petra that is derived from petros, but petros is derived from petra in the sense of a rock.” Jesus Christ asserts no other than petros as a proper name, and petra is used in the sense of a rock. What was the foundation Paul laid? It was not the person of Peter who confessed Christ, but the Person of Christ whom Peter confessed that is the “rock” on which the assembly is built. It is the Christ whom Paul preached that is the only foundation on which believers can build. Paul called some of the believers “fleshly” (I Cor. 3:1-3) in a comparative sense. Christians in time never reach the spiritual plateau to which they do not need teaching, rebuking, and reproving.

Have we forgotten what Paul said about himself? Paul said, “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good” (Rom. 7:14-21).

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