

Preview of Christ's Coming 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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Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 1

(Matt. 16:13-17:13)

W.E. Best

There is an outline of Matthew 16:13-17:13 that is absolutely breathtaking. Anyone studying this passage of Scripture goes from the dust at the feet of Jesus Christ to a foretaste of the coming kingdom and glory of the eternal Son of God. That experience had to be Peter's greatest during his life on earth. He appealed to what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration in his second general Epistle: "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this made known to Him by the Majestic Glory, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And 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 [epilysis, explanation or interpretation], for [an explanation for verse 20] no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved [present passive participle of phero, which means to be guided or carried along] by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet. 1:16-21 NASB).

Peter was so moved by what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration that he referred to it several times in his two general Epistles. The apostle did not spiritualize away the final culmination of prophetic history into nothing but human subjectivity. Therefore, he called the transfiguration scene the power and coming of Christ. It has been said that prophecy is a headlight, not a taillight. When Christ comes in His kingdom, Christians will have infinite light (Rev. 21:23; 22:16). They presently have a lamp (II Pet. 1:19).

It has been said that Christians must live as though heaven were next door. Peter stated, "The end [telos, which means an end attained, termination, consummation, ultimate destiny, or final stage] of all things is at hand [perfect active indicative of eggidzo, which means to approach or draw near]..." (I Pet. 4:7 NASB). Satan knows he cannot destroy the soul of a Christian, but he seeks by every means to quench the Christian's testimony. When he detects that one tactic fails, he resorts to another. He has found what really works. He offers "churches" the very things that Christ refused—the world, its pleasure, and its glory. Religious institutions are accepting and following Satan's offer.

Dispensational pre-millennialists and amillennialists make two serious errors concerning Christ's second advent and His kingdom. Dispensational pre-millennialists represent Christ as wanting to reign by offering the kingdom to the Jews before He suffered for the sins of the elect. On the other hand, amillennialists represent Christ as reigning now before the time of His manifested glory.

Many arguments can be given to show the difference between the assembly and the kingdom, but the foundation of them is the diversity of the mediating work of the Holy Spirit in the assembly and the unmediating reign of Christ in the kingdom. The assembly and the kingdom can be equated no more than imperfection and perfection or the Christian's perishing body and his glorified body.

The idea that saints already possess the kingdom with its authority leads to all kinds of heresies and extravagant claims of authority and fanaticism among Catholics and non-Catholics. "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10) is a prayer that one distinctive kingdom shall come—not two or more, that one may be in another, nor that one may come in different stages. The prayer "Thy kingdom come" cannot be prayed by one who is already in the kingdom because the language points to the future. Apart from the prophecies of the Old Testament, there would have been no basis for this petition (Is. 6; Ps. 74; 89; Dan. 2). Requesting the kingdom proves it did not exist. The kingdom is the Father's to give, not for Christians to help bring into existence. Requesting the kingdom expresses faith and hope. The petition is by those who are heirs of the kingdom (Matt. 25:34).

A miniature preview of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ is expected in the light of the immediate context of Matthew 16:13-17:13—

1. God the Father revealed God the Son (Matt. 16:13-17).
2. God the Son revealed the assembly (Matt. 16:18, 19).
3. The disciples were charged to tell no one that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:20).
4. The spokesman for the disciples had to learn what precedes the kingdom (Matt. 16:21-23).
5. The pathway of self-denial is the assembly's way of life (Matt. 16:24-26).
6. The disciples were foretold of Christ's second coming (Matt. 16:27, 28).
7. Peter, James, and John experienced the foretaste of Christ's coming and kingdom (Matt. 17:1-13).

Almost no one understood the Lord Jesus when He came into the district of Caesarea Philippi. Therefore, His first question to His disciples prepared for the more important question of Matthew 16:15. He proceeded from a general question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13 NASB), to a specific one, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15 NASB). Christ had already encountered the hostility of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He now wanted Peter's testimony of a heavenly revelation from God to reverberate beyond the disciples. In verses 13 and 16, the Lord Jesus was referred to in this order: "Son of Man," "Christ," and "Son of the living God."

Jesus Christ gave Himself the title "Son of Man." People who look for something to discredit the Lord Jesus claim He meant that He was a mere man. However, the Christian knows that a mere man cannot be the Mediator between God and men (I Tim. 2:5). He searches the Scriptures and finds that the term "Son of Man" always refers to one unique Person, Jesus Christ the Lord. He is always the one and only Son of God in the Divine Trinity.

The title “the Christ [ha christos]” (Matt. 16:16 NASB) is added to the proper name “Jesus.” The Lord spoke of Himself as “Christ” in John 17:3—“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (NASB). The name “Christ” is added to “Jesus” as a descriptive title—Jesus the Christ (anointed) of God. The title with the article specifies the Lord Jesus as “the Christ.” Without the article, the title stresses Christ’s relationship with Christians.

Peter’s confession also included the title “Son of the living God.” Jesus Christ asked Peter, “...But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and 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. 16:15-17 NASB). How did Peter know that Jesus Christ was the Son of the one and only living God? He knew something about the Old Testament Scriptures. One great example is Isaiah 40. As a Jew, Peter was convinced that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the only true God.

The apostle Peter knew he had been taught of God. The words of Christ to the Jews included such statements as “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me” (John 6:44, 45 NASB). Furthermore, Christ said to the Jews, “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish...” (John 10:26-28 NASB).

The word of God cannot be made relevant to the natural mind. However, a human gospel of free will can. Peter, like the elect in all ages, had to be drawn by the Father and made willing by grace in order to say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Arminians are as confused about death as people who look at a corpse and say, “He is not dead. Tickle him with the gospel and he will awaken.” Most religionists do not understand that a living sinner is spiritually dead. As a passive sinner, he can neither repent nor believe until the Spirit of grace has made him alive. Since there is no life except through union with Christ, one must be grafted into the bleeding Vine before he can do anything of a spiritual nature. (See John 15:1-11.)

The source of Peter’s blessing was God, not a mere man. The term “flesh and blood” speaks of a mere man. It is used only five times in the New Testament—once by Jesus Christ, “...flesh and blood did not reveal this to you...” (Matt. 16:17 NASB), and four times by Paul: (1) “...Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...” (I Cor. 15:50 NASB). (2) When Paul was commissioned to go to the Gentiles, the apostle said, “...I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood [mere men]” (Gal. 1:16 NASB). The reason was “...the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11, 12 NASB). (3) The apostle showed Christians that their struggle is not only against flesh and blood (mere men), but also “...against the rulers,

against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12 NASB). (4) In Hebrews 2:14, Paul showed the uniqueness of Christ’s humanity: “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (NASB). Christ’s humanity was not contaminated with original sin. Jesus Christ’s human nature cannot be compared with a mere man, and that is the reason He is the Christian’s God-Man Savior. By Christ’s uniqueness, the elect are blessed. This means they have a high and rare privilege. Peter’s confession of Christ was not his blessing, but the Person of Christ he confessed resulted in his blessing.

Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 2

(Matt. 16:17-19)

W.E. Best

Anyone seeking to understand Christ and His assembly in the light of the restricted creeds of men is led to subjectivism and arrogance. Human creeds reveal how little a religionist knows about the word of God because each religion has its particular constitution (established customs), articles of faith (basic beliefs or doctrines), and by-laws (rules to govern). On the other hand, the infinite mind of God revealed in the Scriptures manifests to the Christian how little he knows. When anyone memorizes a humanly arranged creed, he thinks he has arrived. However, when a person recognizes that he is the servant of the limitless sky of Divine truth under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he is humbled at the feet of the infinite God who reveals Himself by degrees through His infinite word of truth.

Divine concealment is a subject that will cause disturbance in the average religious institution. All truth originated in the one and only God. God reveals some truth, but He does not reveal all truth: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29 NASB). God conceals truth from some: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:25-27 NASB). Christ answered Peter's confession by telling him it was a revelation from God: "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 NASB).

The true understanding of Christ and His assembly is from the New Testament, not from human creeds. A creed is like the sky painted on canvas. The sky on canvas is a ceiling beyond which the human eye does not wander. Outside the art gallery is a different sky that opens up to the eye, a sky that seems to recede forever. The sky on canvas is looked at, but the sky of nature is looked through. Human creeds, like the sky on canvas, are looked at. They are hard, dry, and limited. However, the truth concerning Christ and His assembly, viewed in the light of Scripture, is looked through. It is deep, living, and infinite. Every Christian is behooved to view Christ and His assembly in the unlimited sky of Divine revelation and not in the limited creeds of religious men.

There is a difference between observation and revelation. Christ's first question to His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13 NASB), is related to observation. The word "people" lifts the question above all national distinctions. The title "Son of Man" is representative of Christ in His mediatorial capacity. The observations of men are revealed in the disciples' answer to Christ's question (Matt. 16:14). In this modern world, the preaching of John the Baptist would be considered uncouth, rude,

and untrained. However, the sovereign God gives the orders. He does the calling, and Christians must work within the framework of God's eternal purpose. John the Baptist was faithful enough to call sin by its rightful name and sinners by their rightful names—"brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7). Today sin is erroneously viewed as disease and sinners as helpless and innocent victims. The faithfulness of John the Baptist cost him his head when he exposed the adulterous relationship of Herod with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (Matt. 14:1-12).

Elijah's name was the second used to show the difference between observation and revelation. His name is mentioned in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament prophet. The power of Elijah was known. His qualities of faith, courage, and zeal were understood. He had courage to go before King Ahab and say, "...As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (I Kings 17:1 NASB). Elijah challenged the leaders of religion (I Kings 18). The prophet was unafraid to express his master passion when he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine alters and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (I Kings 19:10 NASB).

Jeremiah's was the third name given to show the difference between observation and revelation. Jeremiah was more like Christ than John the Baptist or Elijah. Although his life was an example of patient endurance and undeserved suffering, he could not be compared with the eternal Son of God. The important thing about Jeremiah was his foretelling the new covenant. Now, by revelation, Jesus Christ would inaugurate the new covenant. As it took the preaching of John the Baptist, the power of Elijah, and the compassion of Jeremiah to prepare for Christ's first advent, it will take the same preaching, power, and compassion for His second advent. The dawning of a new day is near. Some years ago, some mountain climbers in the Swiss Alps were awakened early one morning by a loud crackling noise high above them. They were frightened, but the guide told them not to fear. He said the rising sun caused the noise. Men are afraid today by the crackling noise of wars, famines, and earthquakes in various places. However, these are signs of a new day. The kingdom is connected with the Son of righteousness.

Matthew 16 records the dawn of a new day, a revelation of the assembly. The revelation was complete in what was known to Peter, but it was not the complete revelation of God. The context of Matthew 16 proves Peter's knowledge was limited. The limitless sky of God's truth kept receding before Peter's spiritual sight, and the following truths were included in his confession: (1) The human nature Christ assumed was anointed. (2) The anointing refers to His office. (3) The title "Son of God" refers to Christ's eternity.

Peter's confession was not the result of carnal reasoning. He was unable to see through the veil of Christ's human nature and behold His Divine nature. The act of the Father enlightened Peter. Only those who have learned from the Father come to Christ: "It is

written in the prophets, AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (John 6:45 NASB). Spiritual things have the influence of reality in the hearts of renewed persons.

Peter confessed the Lord as Israel’s Christ (anointed) and the assembly’s Savior. The term “Christ” is especially connected with Israel because Israel had been promised the coming of the anointed One, the Messiah, who would sit on the holy hill of Zion. The apostle Peter called Jesus the Son of the “living” God. The apostle later emphasized the word “living” in his Epistles—living word (I Pet. 1:23), living hope (I Pet. 1:3), and living stones (I Pet. 2:5). Scripture clearly reveals the Messiah would be God’s Son (Ps. 2).

This was not Peter’s first confession. Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus Christ, the Messiah (John 1:41, 42). Peter confessed the Lord Jesus: “And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69 NASB). His confession was made when the multitudes deserted the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus promised Peter that his name would be changed: “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means Peter)” (John 1:42 NASB). That new name was bestowed in Matthew 16:18—“you are Peter.”

Christ commended Peter for his confession that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God: “Blessed [makarios, happy] are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17 NASB). True happiness results from knowing that one has been spiritually illuminated in his mind. As worldly actions are motivated by worldly affections, spiritual actions are motivated by spiritual affections. Love of the world results in worldly activities (I John 2:15-17). Love for Christ results in spiritual activities (I Pet. 1:8; Col. 3:1-4). Love is not only the chief affection but also the fountain of all affections. If a person is unsaved, love is selfish and self-centered, which concludes in his being egocentric. If a person is a Christian, his love is unselfish and Christocentric. Peter later told that his holy affections came to the fore under severe trial (I Pet. 1:3-7). As there are no worldly affections without worldly wisdom (I Cor. 1:18-28; II Tim. 3:7), there are no spiritual affections without spiritual knowledge (I Cor. 1:18-28; John 17:3; Col. 1:6). Peter’s knowledge of Christ was of Divine illumination of things that had become reality to him.

One of the most controversial subjects the Christian will face is that of the assembly. A diligent and unbiased study of Matthew 16:18-19 is necessary for the sincere assembly member. Think of all the religious views that take shelter under the name “church.” Therefore, the “church” covers as much territory as the Sahara Desert (3,500,000 square miles) and is just as dry spiritually. Does the word “church” have anything in common with the Catholic Church, Church of England, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church of the Brethren, Church of Christ, Church of Christ Scientist, Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, Church of God, Nazarene Church, and others?

All religious affections are not attended with Divine conviction because they are not produced by spiritual illumination of the mind. Spiritual affections spring from the beauty

of Divine things. Therefore, their beauty is discerned through the illumination of the Christian's mind. This view produces conviction of their reality. Spiritual things have the influence of reality on renewed persons. That is why Abraham by his God-given faith could call non-existing things as existing (Rom. 4:17) and see the reality of things promised and welcome them from a distance (Heb. 11:13).

Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 3

(MATT. 16:18, 19)

W.E. Best

As soon as Christ announced the assembly, He reminded the disciples that the foundation on whom the assembly is constructed must be proclaimed: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18, 19 NASB). As soon as the Divine declaration was made that Adam should not be alone, Divine operation followed. From a rib God made a woman. The Divine presentation occurred when the Lord God brought the woman to the man. This portrays Christ and His assembly (Eph. 5:22-32). Therefore, it was proper that Jesus Christ should have His wife throughout eternity. The declaration and operation are being fulfilled during the age of the assembly (II Cor. 11:1-4), but the presentation is one of the last great events of prophecy (Rev. 19:7-10).

No passage of Scripture has caused more controversy than Matthew 16:18-19. The following questions have divided religionists into many camps:

1. What is the difference between Peter and the rock?
2. Who is the rock on whom the assembly is constructed?
3. Is the assembly of Matthew 16:18 local or universal?
4. Are the assembly and the kingdom equivalent in meaning?
5. What are the keys of the kingdom?
6. To whom were the keys given?
7. What does it mean to bind and to loose?
8. What is Hades?

A note of warning should be given before continuing this controversial study. One would suppose that any person who excelled in things that are good would be filled with self-satisfaction, and the person who is unconcerned with things that are good would be humbled under a sense of his sin and negligence. However, observation and experience attest that the very reverse is true. Paul found himself the victim of injustice, ill treatment, false report, and personal abuse. These are things that are observable to others, but Paul's real experience was his excelling in good things. He was decreasing that Christ might increase (John 3:30). He counted himself less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). He preferred others in honor before himself (Phil. 2:3). No wonder he

said, "BUT HE WHO BOASTS, LET HIM BOAST IN THE LORD. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (II Cor. 10:17, 18 NASB).

There was an essential difference between Paul and his opponents:

1. They gloried in their triumphs. Paul gloried in his tragedies.
2. They gloried in their pleasures. Paul gloried in his pain.
3. They gloried in things that made them strong. Paul gloried in his weakness.
4. They admired those who did well to themselves: "...men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself" (Ps. 49:18 KJV). Paul was unconcerned about judgment by men: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or of man's judgment..." (I Cor. 4:3 KJV).
5. Their approval was according to outward appearance, form of godliness, and numerical strength. Paul had God's approval, which is according to inward grace (Eph. 2:8) that desires more grace (James 4:6) and is growing in grace (II Pet. 3:18).

Christ introduced His work: "And I also say to you that you are Peter [petros], and upon this rock [petra] I will build [progressive future active indicative of the verb oikodomeo] My church [ekklesia]; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower [future active indicative of katischuo] it" (Matt. 16:18 NASB). The two nouns "Peter" (petros, a stone) and "rock" (petra, a rock) must be distinguished. In the New Testament, petros is the Greek rendering of the surname Cephas, the apostle Simon. A rock may be illustrated by the foundation upon which the wise man built: "...a wise man, who built his house upon the rock [petra]" (Matt. 7:24 NASB). Therefore, petros is usually a smaller detachment of the massive rock (petra). The word "rock" is used symbolically of God in both the Old and New Testaments: "For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:3, 4 NASB). "The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God" (II Sam. 23:3 NASB). "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps. 18:2 NASB). "And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4 NASB).

A study of the derivation of the two words petros and petra reveals that petros derives from petra. According to I Peter 2:4-12, the apostle is a living stone in Christ's spiritual house. The genders of petros and petra are different in Matthew 16:18 to show that Christ was speaking not of Peter who confessed Christ, but of the Person of Christ that Peter confessed. That is the rock on which the assembly is being built. Peter's rock-like

character is derived from the massive rock (Christ's infinite rock-like character of His Person and Work).

The variation of the expressions—petros and petra—proves that Christ intended that Christians should never understand that Peter is the rock on which Christ builds His assembly. Christ gave Peter the name of Cephas at the time his brother Andrew brought him to the Lord Jesus: "...Jesus looked at him, and said, You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means Peter)" (John 1:42 NASB). However, not until Matthew 16:18 did the Lord Jesus reveal the reason He gave Simon the name kephas, which translated means petros. Observe that Christ did not say, "You are the rock on which I will build My church."

Roman Catholicism teaches that Christ made Peter the visible head of His church (assembly) when He said He would build His church (assembly). They believe they are the only true church established by Christ. Their assumption is that her voice is the same as that of God. They consider this an attribute of the Roman Catholic Church and believe that those who know this and willingly refuse to join the Catholic Church cannot be saved.

In contrast to Roman Catholic teaching, Jesus Christ, not Peter, is the only Head of the assembly Christ is building. He is the foundation rock of the assembly. Immediately after the declaration of the assembly's foundation, Christ revealed to His disciples the way and manner in which He would lay her foundation by His suffering and death: "From that time Jesus Christ 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" (Matt. 16:21 NASB). Each person regenerated by the Holy Spirit is in reality united with the foundation stone. All the regenerated are not only built on Christ, but they are also cemented together in the walls of the spiritual house. They are literally united with Christ's Person and literally united in the doctrine (teaching) of Christ. Therefore, faith is the fruit of the Christian's union with Christ, and confession is the fruit of doctrine (I John 4:1-3; Rom. 10:9). Objective truth becomes a subjective reality to the Christian.

Peter was not foolish enough to think Christ made him—the weak and vacillating person he knew himself to be—the rock on which Christ is building His assembly. Subsequent to Christ's statement, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church [assembly]..." (Matt. 16:18), and before His death, it was necessary for Him to say to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31, 32 NASB). Afterward, Peter could do nothing greater for the brothers than call their attention to the prophecy of Isaiah: "For this is contained in Scripture: BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL 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. But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY" (I Pet. 2:6-10 NASB).

The prophetic stone of Isaiah 28:16 spoken of by Peter was also the chosen One: "BEHOLD, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law" (Is. 42:1-4 NASB). This prophecy is introduced with "BEHOLD," an interjection, which means to get an eye full by looking intently. God is calling attention to His Servant, the Messiah. This prophecy is referred to in Matthew 12:14-21.

If the assembly could have been built on Peter, it would have failed. Peter and his successors are imperfect men; therefore, Rome cannot prove its claim concerning them. The inefficiency of the Aaronic priesthood did not perfect the old covenant. However, the new covenant rests on Christ alone because He has the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16). Immediately after Christ said, "upon this rock [petra] I will build My church [ekklesia, noun accusative singular feminine]," He revealed to His disciples how He would lay the foundation by His death, burial, and resurrection. Peter spoke of Christ as a living Stone (I Pet. 2:4) and then passed from the metaphor to the reality. The chosen Stone that was rejected by men has become the corner Stone for His chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (I Pet. 2:6-9). All the regenerated are not only built upon Christ, but they also have indestructible life because of their endless relationship to the One who has indestructible life. Therefore, those who believe in this tried and tested Rock will never be separated from Him. This is a reality that will not lead to shame because it can never change.

Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 4

(Matt. 16:18, 19)

W.E. Best

Christ introduced the assembly because He would be “head over all things to the church [assembly], which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22, 23 NASB). Matthew 16:18-19 proclaims the assembly’s foundation: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The emphasis is not “you are Peter” over against Peter’s confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). As the Father had revealed one truth to Peter (Matt. 11:27), the Lord Jesus would reveal to Peter the truth concerning the assembly. The first word in the Greek text of Matthew 16:18 is kago, a combination of kai (and) and ego (first person pronoun, I), which means “and I”, “in like manner I,” “I in turn,” “I myself,” or “I also.” The word kai is a simple connective, but kago places the Lord Jesus on the level with the Father in revealing. Therefore, Christ was saying, “ I also [I as well or I likewise] will reveal to you what the assembly is that I will build.”

The following verses of Scripture should be observed in order to get the impact of kago: (1) “...My Father is working until now, and I Myself [kago] am working” (John 5:17 NASB). (2) “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also [kago] loved you...” (John 15:9 NASB). (3) “As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also [kago, I likewise] have sent them into the world” (John 17:18 NASB). (4) “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also [kago] will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10 NASB). (5) “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also [kago] overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21 NASB). Conclusively, any person who denies that Jesus Christ is equal with the Father has no Savior because He and the Father are one: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NASB).

The true assembly can have only one foundation: “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11 NASB)—

NEGATIVELY, this foundation could not be Peter because he was just a man. When Cornelius, a devout man who feared God, met Peter at Caesarea, he fell at his feet in reverence. “But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I too am just a man” (Acts 10:26 NASB). Does this sound like Peter was the first Pope? Paul never referred to Peter as a Pope. He taught against persons attaching themselves to any man (I Cor. 1:12, 13; 3:21-23). Paul never referred to the papacy when he spoke to the officers of the assembly (Eph. 4:11, 12). Even when he spoke of “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” as a revelatory foundation of the assembly, he said Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). The apostles ceased when the revelatory foundation was

completed.

Paul's rebuke of Peter for compromise was difficult, but since Peter's sin was public it must be publicly exposed. In fact, his sin has become a part of Biblical history. Therefore, Christians need to be reminded that as long as they are in the flesh grace has not perfected its work in their condition before God and man. Furthermore, it proves the Roman Catholic claim that Peter was indefectible is false. The Biblical record states, "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews? We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:11-21 NASB).

Solomon in his wisdom said, "Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed" (Prov. 27:5 NASB). Christians correctly cry out against the Roman Catholic dogmas of authority, infallibility, and indefectibility. By authority, they mean the Pope and bishops. By infallibility, they mean the church by the assistance of the Holy Spirit cannot err in doctrine, faith, or morals. By indefectibility, they mean the Catholic Church as Christ founded it will last until the end of time. Much of the denominational and nondenominational teaching of today should be condemned. Most of the ecclesiastical schisms for two thousand years would have been prevented if there had been the honest frankness of Paul on one side and the manly meekness of Peter on the other. Secret love can be real; but when it fails to speak out when it should, it does a disservice to both the one loving and the one loved.

Public rebuke for open sin should be the motto for every assembly. Peter's act of sin was hypocrisy. It was not what he believed to be right, but it was an expediency adopted in a moment of weakness. The apostle had already learned from his encounter with Cornelius that God's electing grace makes Jews and non-Jews alike in Jesus Christ. No bands of friendship should keep God's servants from reproving sin. Public sin must be openly admonished.

Today's appeal is that no one is perfect, and people object to rebuke for sin. No one can point to a single perfect Christian in the Bible, not even to Elizabeth and Zacharias who walked blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord (Luke 1:6). That sounds great, and it is. However, when a person reads a little further, he finds that Zacharias was punished for his sin of failure to believe God's words (Luke 1:9-19). God sent Gabriel to announce his punishment: "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time" (Luke 1:19 NASB).

A careful study of Peter's life reveals his inconsistent conduct. Notwithstanding Peter's inconsistency, God used him to teach all Christians some valuable lessons. Peter was the first to say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16 NASB), and he was the first to deny Jesus Christ: "Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore to him, You are not also one of His disciples, are you? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, Did I not see you in the garden with Him? Peter therefore denied it again; and immediately a cock crowed" (John 18:25-27 NASB). When Christ began to wash the disciples' feet, Peter said, "Never shall You wash my feet! Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me. Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:8, 9 NASB). Peter took his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's slave, Malchus (John 18:10, 11). Christ did not need Peter's help: "And a certain one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, Stop! No more of this. And He touched his ear and healed him" (Luke 22:50, 51 NASB). The evil Peter did was cancelled by a miracle performed by the Head of the assembly.

All the negative things about Peter condemn the Roman Catholic concept of Peter as the first Pope. Peter could not be the unwavering foundation against Satan's assaults. According to the following things, how would it sound for Peter to be the first head of the Roman Catholic Church? (1) Peter spoke as Satan when he "...took Him [Christ] aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (Matt. 16:22 NASB). How could a person who spoke like Satan and had his mind on the interests of man instead of the interests of God be the head of Christ's assembly? (2) Peter did not know the difference between positional and conditional cleansing. The apostle had a problem with this until Christ taught him in John 13:5-10. (3) A person carrying a sword and de-earring people would be a strange Pope. (4) Peter denied that he knew Christ while he was warming himself by the fire of Christ's enemies. This would be a terrible head of the assembly.

POSITIVELY, Jesus Christ is the only unshakeable foundation for the assembly. God the Father chose His only begotten Son to be the God-Man foundation of the assembly. Therefore, the assembly is built on the God-Man—Christ, and not on the God-like man—Peter: "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine [God-like] nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (II Pet. 1:4 NASB). This verse does not teach the deification of the Christian. It expresses the essential

truth of the Christian's God-like nature. The assembly is built on the God-Man slain, not on anyone who has been given a God-like nature: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church [assembly] of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28 NASB). Peter, the repentant slave of Jesus Christ, said "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold from our 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" (I Pet. 1:18-20 NASB).

Scriptural evidence condemns the Roman Catholic theory that Peter was the first visible head of Christ's church and, since the church is apostolic, that it was to be governed by a succession of apostles. The truth is that Peter did not act as the head of Christians in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. Furthermore, there is no Biblical evidence that Peter's so-called authority was transferred to a succession of apostles. There are no extraordinary servants of God today (I Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:21).

If Peter had been the first head of the assembly, Paul would have built on the foundation of another person. However, he did not build on another man's foundation: "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation" (Rom. 15:20 NASB). If Peter were the first head of the assembly, each member of the assembly would have to say, "I am of Cephas." This would mean that Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 1:12-13 would have to be different. He would have had to condemn all the parties except those who said, "I am of Cephas." These are facts, which everyone either embraces or denies.

Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 5

(Matt. 16:18)

W.E. Best

Christ specifically said, "I will build [oikodomeso, future active indicative first person singular of oikodomeo, to construct or establish] My church [ekklesian, noun accusative singular feminine of ekklesia, derived from the compound verb ekkaleo—ek, out of and kaleo, to call or summon]." The noun ekklesia is used 115 times in the New Testament—82 in the singular number and 33 in the plural number. Three times it is used when speaking of an ungodly assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). An example of unity against God was when "they shouted for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:34 NASB). Stephen used the word ekklesia one time in his controversial message that led to his martyrdom (Acts 7:38). All the other 111 references in the New Testament refer to either the universal or the local assembly. In summary, ekklesia can be a body of citizens, the universal assembly Christ is building, local assemblies throughout the world, or the assembly in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses.

Jesus Christ took His rightful place when He told Peter that flesh and blood did not reveal the truth of Himself to him but His Father who is in heaven. He gave Peter a place and a name connected with the grace the Father gave him by the regenerating Holy Spirit. He also told Peter He [Christ] would build His assembly, which includes the calling out of those given to Christ by the Father to become His bride (Matt. 16:18, 19).

As the God-Man is the temple of God, the assembly is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Concerning Himself Christ said, "...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19 NASB). He spoke of the temple of His body (John 2:21). The fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form in Jesus Christ: "For in Him [Christ] all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9 NASB). Concerning Christ's sheep Paul asked the Corinthians, "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (I Cor. 6:19, 20 NASB). God can be seen only through Christ, and the Holy Spirit can be seen only through the assembly of His saints.

The assembly is God's building: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon 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 NASB). God's building is a progressive work: (1) The spiritual stones are added to the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief corner Stone. (2) The stones that have been added to Christ's assembly grow spiritually (Eph. 4:11-16). Both apostolic and prophetic teaching center in the chief corner Stone who was refused, but He is now the head Stone. Our Lord applied the symbol of the

Stone to Himself (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17). Peter also applied it to Him (Acts 4:10-12; I Pet. 2:6, 7).

Many teach that Christ's predictive statement "I will build My church [assembly]" proves it points to Pentecost. They believe Pentecost was the beginning of Christ's assembly. How can they explain Christ's statement concerning assembly discipline in Matthew 18:17? A fellow member who knows another member has sinned should reprove him privately. If the guilty person does not heed the exhortation, he should take one or two more as witnesses. If the sinning person refuses to heed the reproof before two or more witnesses, it should be reported to the assembly. "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [assembly]; and if he refuses to listen even to the church [assembly], let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (Matt. 18:17 NASB).

Paul spoke of the assembly "having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Eph. 2:20 NASB). This proves Christ was already finding His sheep even before His death (John 10). Furthermore, He gave the commission to the eleven disciples subsequent to His death and resurrection (Matt. 28:16-20). No one can question that Christ formed the foundation of the assembly before His death and resurrection.

The foundation of the assembly included the eleven disciples (apostles) and the prophets (Eph. 2:20). The verb *epoikodomeo* translated "having been built upon" comes from three Greek words—*epi* (upon), *oikos* (house), and *domeo* (to build). It means to build a house (superstructure) upon a foundation. Peter had much sin and forgiveness, and Paul classified himself as foremost of sinners (I Tim. 1:15). However, God prepared Peter and Paul for their respective responsibilities. Experiences on the pilgrim pathway are to qualify saints for their respective influences in life. Peter was prepared to feed Christ's sheep because he had been fed. Unlike the Catholic Pope, when Christ told Peter to "feed My sheep" he did not think the sheep were his.

A statement in the commission to the assembly has been a problem for many Christians: "And when they [the disciples] saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful" (Matt. 28:17 NASB). A question that continually comes to the fore is how they could worship while they doubted. Although the disciples had previously believed that Jesus Christ had been raised out from among the dead, they doubted that this was the Son of God. Doubt can be attributed to measuring things by human standards or from the desire for more proof than God has decreed to give.

A study of the verb "doubtful" (*distadzo*, which means to be doubtful or to waver in one's faith) is necessary at this point. This Greek verb is used only twice in the New Testament, and both refer to true disciples (Matt. 14:31; 28:17). Peter's lack of faith, not his lack of sight, caused Christ to rebuke him: "But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:30, 31 NASB). Although the disciples believed the body of Christ had been resurrected, they wavered concerning the One they saw whether He

was the Christ. The Lord Jesus cured this problem by drawing near to them. Their worship began as Christ approached them (Matt. 28:17).

The weak disciples were strengthened by Christ's declaration of His authority given to Him in heaven and on earth: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority [exousia] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18 NASB). The Greek word *exousia* may mean either power or authority, but authority is the most fitting word in the light of the context. This does not mean Christ had no power before the Father rewarded Him for His obedience (Phil. 2:9, 10). As the resurrected and glorified Savior, He now possessed the reins of providence: "And He is before all things, and in [en] Him all things hold together [sunesteken, perfect active indicative of *sunistemi*, which means to continue, endure, or exist]" (Col. 1:17 NASB). The perfect tense of *sunistemi* gives permanence to Christ's providential care of the assembly because it expresses perfective action, which looks at both ends of the action.

Attention should be directed to the preposition *en* used in Colossians 1:17. There is no problem with "He is before all things" because of other Scriptures like John 1:1—"In the beginning was the Word." However, there is a problem with the preposition *en* if it is used as the locative of sphere in which all things are held together. Christ is not a subjective part of creation, but He is an objective message to it. If the locative case of sphere were used, this translation would be incorrect: "And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17 NASB). On the other hand, if the instrumental of means were used, this translation would be correct: "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (KJV). Christ is not a part of the system. He existed before He brought anything into existence: "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3 NASB).

As the Father commissioned Christ, Christ commissioned the apostles, and the apostles commissioned the assemblies through the instrumentality of the inspired word of God. Christ told the apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19, 20 NASB).

Jesus Christ was the first Apostle (Heb. 3:1). The apostles were those chosen by the first Apostle (Matt. 10:1-15). The first Apostle came in the Father's name (John 5:43). The apostles went forth in Christ's name (Acts 4:18). The first Apostle could do nothing apart from the Father (John 5:19). The apostles could do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5). The first Apostle was never left alone (John 16:32). The apostles were never alone (Matt. 28:20). The first Apostle was sent to enter His glory through suffering (I Pet. 1:11). The apostles would suffer before they reigned (II Tim. 2:12).

Christ's commission and the apostles' commission differ. The Father commissioned Christ to become the incarnate Word and to atone for sin. Christ commissioned the apostles to proclaim the word and become ministers of reconciliation. (See John 1:1, 14; Matt. 16:21; II Tim. 4:2; II Cor. 5:18.)

Christ's commission and the apostles' commission are similar. Their word would continue in time. They were not to be ministered to but to minister, not to do their own will but the will of the Sender, and not to destroy the law and the prophets but to interpret and fulfill them.

The commission of Christ cannot be carried out by man-made inventions. Today there is an exercise of zeal to increase assembly membership at any cost. Neo-Pythagoreans equated reality with numbers. Therefore, the modern assembly prefers achievement to God's word. "Reaching people with whatever it takes" is the familiar slogan. Two gods, numbers and success, dominate such methodology. Religionists are led to believe that bigger is better.

Preview of Christ's Coming Kingdom-Part 6

(Matt. 16:18)

W.E. Best

The foundation of the assembly's unity is the nature of the assembly herself. There is unity between the Father and the Son: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (John 17:20, 21 NASB). There is unity between the Son and His own: "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me" (John 17:22, 23 NASB). There will be one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:16). One body represents the assembly (Eph. 4:4). God the Father is one; Christ the Mediator is one; and the Spirit who unites the elect to Christ is one. The assembly is the one body of which Christ is the Head, the one building of which Christ is the corner Stone, and the one bride of which Christ is the Bridegroom.

Properly speaking, the assembly Christ is building is the absolutely invisible assembly. Therefore, the visible aspect of the assembly is not the reality of the assembly any more than the Christian's understanding, experience, and interpretation of God's love is the perfect reality of His love. For example, the love that surpasses man's knowledge of its pluriform dimensions—breadth, length, depth, and height—does not hinder the unity of fellowship of that love (Eph. 3:14-19).

"Pluriformity," a term used by some theologians, protects the outlook of one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:16); and, on the other hand, it keeps men from closing their eyes to the actual multiplicity of the assembly. Paul used the adjective *polupoikilos* when speaking of God's wisdom: "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold [*polupoikilos*] wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [assembly] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:8-10 NASB). This adjective is a compound word made up of *polus*, which means much or many, and *poikilos*, which means varied or diverse (manifold). Peter used the adjective *poikilos* in I Peter 4:10—"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (NASB). God's wisdom is greatly diversified. The visible aspect of the assembly is not swallowed up in the invisible, and the invisible is not swallowed up in the visible. Christ had two natures in His incarnation, but one nature did not swallow up the other.

The unity of Christ's assembly, which is His body, cannot be affected by the ignorance, inconsistency, and sin of her members. Disorders in the local aspect of the assembly never affect the unity God gives His people in their standing (position) before Him (Eph. 4:1-16). Disorders affect the fellowship (state or condition) but not the unity of the

assembly. The unity that is imperfectly manifested now will be completely revealed in the kingdom. The degree of its manifestation in the present is determined by the degree of spiritual growth.

The threefold work of Christ must not be overlooked in regard to His assembly: (1) He died for the assembly—past tense (Eph. 5:25). (2) He sanctifies and cleanses the assembly—present tense (Eph. 5:26). (3) He will present the assembly to Himself in all her glory, holy, blameless, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing—future tense (Eph. 5:27). The eschatological outlook does not leave room for a defeated attitude because it is a stimulus to live for Christ (Phil. 2:15; I Pet. 2:9, 10; I John 3:2, 3).

The local aspect of the assembly with her appointed officers and ordinances does not constitute the assembly's essence. These officers and ordinances belong only to her earthly manifestation. By her very nature, the assembly has two aspects—invisible and visible, internal and external. In the local aspect of the assembly, the two aspects do not fully correspond. The local aspect has a certain amount of contradictions that keep her from perfectly expressing what she is before God. Therefore, the “mystery of godliness” of I Timothy 3:16 helps Christians to understand the mystery of the assembly (I Tim. 3:15; Col. 1:18-29). Heavenly truth has been committed to an earthen vessel. This means that union with the Head by the Spirit of regeneration is experienced in an earthly vessel (II Cor. 4:6, 7).

The invisible aspect of the assembly is the life principle. However, the invisible aspect has a visible function in the world. The grace of God has been deposited in earthen vessels. God's grace is not dead capital that can be laid up in a napkin (Luke 19:20). It is a living possession and blessing (I Cor. 4:7; 6:19, 20; Acts 2:41-47).

The incarnation of Christ is both a manifestation and a mystery (I Tim. 3:16). Beware of those who seek to merge humanity with Deity or Deity with humanity. The same principle of manifestation and mystery applies to the assembly. Therefore, the assembly is visibly manifested, but she is not absolutely visible. Her visibility is only a sign directing Christians beyond the visible to the invisible. Christians are already what they are becoming, and they are becoming what they already are in the sphere of grace.

The assembly is neither visible nor invisible. She is both. To say the assembly is wholly visible would be like stating that 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 the assembly are mysteries to the world.

Christ followed His statement “I will build my assembly” by assuring the security of the assembly: “...and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18 NASB). The Greek noun for “gates” is nominative feminine gender and plural number of pule, which means gate (Matt. 7:13—twice, 14; 16:18; Luke 7:12; 13:24—KJV; Acts 3:10; 9:24; 12:10; 16:13—translated city in the KJV; Heb. 13:12). It is used metaphorically in Matthew 7:13-14, architecturally in Luke 7:12, as a prison gate in Jerusalem in Acts

12:10, as a city gate in Jerusalem in Hebrews 13:12, and figuratively, as the gates of Hades in Matthew 16:18.

The Greek word for “Hades” (hades) means the underworld in contrast to heaven, the place of punishment, or the lowest place or condition. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew sheol is translated by the Greek hades. Poetically, it is said to have gates, which shows that something more than the grave is meant: “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, And broader than the sea” (Job 11:7-9). Hades is the invisible state that has a depth that cannot be known. (See Deut. 32:22; Job 26:6; Ps. 16:10; 18:5; 139:8; Prov. 5:5.) Luke explained that both the righteous and the unrighteous went there in Old Testament times (Luke 16:19-31). Abraham’s bosom and the place of punishment are said to be in Hades, but they are separated by a great chasm (chasma, a great chasm, used only in Luke 16:26).

Jesus Christ has the keys of death and Hades: “...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. Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches [assemblies], and the seven lampstands are the seven churches [assemblies]” (Rev. 1:17-20 NASB). When Christians compare this passage with Matthew 16:18, they are assured of what Christ’s death on behalf of the elect accomplished. It accomplished not only their deliverance from sin, but also their preservation for the kingdom. As the living Stone, Christ is the Guarantor of the perpetuity of the living stones. The gates of Hades shall never prevail (future active indicative of *katischuo* meaning to be strong to another’s detriment, to overpower—Matt. 16:18, to predominate, or to get the upper hand—Luke 23:23) against Christ’s assembly. When Christ gave the commission to the disciples He told them all authority had been given to Him: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Matt. 28:18, 19 NASB).

The final seat of authority is not found in any religious denomination. That would be subjectivism. The final seat of authority is in the completed revelation of Scripture, which points to Jesus Christ who is God’s eternal Son. Biblical authority in conversation is one thing, but Biblical authority in practice is another. To argue about the Bible being authoritative but being unable to agree on what it says is self-defeating as far as doctrinal teaching is concerned. Denominationalism and non-denominationalism prove the disagreement that exists on what the Bible actually says. There is no unanimity on basic principles in professing Christendom.

There will never be perfect unanimity of mind on every Bible subject until imperfect Christians are perfected in eternity. However, that is no excuse for Christians making no effort to discover the main problem in professing Christendom. The greatest problem seems to be the mystical claims of many who say they are guided by an inward light

that discards the rules of grammar and the common use of words. Their common statement is “God spoke to me about that verse or subject.” That is subjectivism in which they take refuge. The inspired apostles and prophets never spiritualized away the culmination of history into pure subjectivity (II Pet. 1:16-21).

Too many religionists today set themselves up as guardians of Jesus Christ; and, like Peter, they are correcting Christ with their false statements concerning His Person and Work. If Peter had not appointed himself as a guardian, he would not have rebuked the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that Christ’s rebuke of Peter came immediately after he made a true confession. His self-appointment as guardian became the object of rebuke from Christ. “And He [Christ] warned them to tell no one about Him. And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Mark 8:30-33 NASB).

“Get behind Me Satan” should be told every person who misrepresents Christ’s Person and Work. Matthew’s account of this incident states, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me” (Matt. 16:23 NASB). Every God-called elder should tell every Catholic Pope this because the Pope places water before blood—baptism before regeneration by Christ’s blood. Furthermore, every preacher who says Christ is peccable should be told, “Get behind me Satan.” What is the difference between Peter, who desired that Christ not go to Calvary, Catholic Popes, who believe in baptismal regeneration, and preachers, who say Christ could sin? Peter repented and was used by God, but how many Catholic Popes and preachers repent of their heresies?

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