



# CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS FUTURE

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V O L U M E III

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Formation  
of the King's Bride



W.E. BEST

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# **CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS FUTURE**

## **VOLUME III**

### **FORMATION OF THE KING'S BRIDE**

by  
**W. E. Best**

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This is Volume III of an extensive series on the subject of Christ's future Kingdom. Volume I presents the King's genealogy; Volume II, the introduction of the King; and Volume III, the formation of the King's Bride. Future volumes will be released periodically. The complete series will comprehensively cover all aspects of Christ's future Kingdom as revealed in the Scriptures from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.





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## INTRODUCTION

The first advent of Jesus Christ ushered in the age of Christ's assembly during the period of the times of the Gentiles. Distinction must be made between the times of the Gentiles and the fullness of the Gentiles. The times of the Gentiles began with Nebuchadnezzar, and they will be consummated when the Son of Man comes in power and glory to establish His kingdom on the earth (Luke 21:24). The fullness of the Gentiles speaks of Christ, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, taking out from among the Gentiles His assembly which He is presently building (Rom. 11:25; Acts 15:13-17). Subsequent to the fullness of the Gentiles, the last form of Gentile rule on earth will be destroyed by Christ's second advent (Rev. 19:11-21). Hence, the assembly which Christ is building is not an eschatological kingdom.

Jesus Christ assumed human nature in order to bring Himself into reality with His covenant people, both elect Jews and elect non-Jews. The eternal covenant has the God of peace as its Author, the great Shepherd of the sheep as its fulfillment, and the sheep for whom Christ died as its recipients (Heb.

13:20). The incarnate Savior must suffer before He enters into the glories of His kingship. Thus, He was qualified for His future reign as King of kings and Lord of lords by His sacrificial death on behalf of the elect and His taking on Himself human nature in its glorified form. Furthermore, His redeemed ones must not only be regenerated but also have glorified human natures like Christ's in order to reign with Him in His future kingdom. This is the concise meaning of "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3) for both the assembly and Israel (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 1:10; Is. 25:9; Rom. 11:26).

The prophets described the sufferings of Christ, and they also spoke at length about the consummation of salvation in the coming kingdom. Although we must never detract from the sufferings of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26), it is equally important that we do not limit the full scope of Scripture which includes the completion of salvation in the kingdom. The sufferings of Jesus Christ were the means of securing "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3-5).

The "mystery of godliness" (I Tim. 3:16) enables us to better understand the heavenly treasure being committed to an earthly vessel, the local aspect of Christ's assembly. Christians embrace the truth that practical sanctification is wrought in us through the local assembly. The assembly is the pillar (support) and ground (basis) of the truth, and truth is the means of practical sanctification (I Tim. 3:14, 15; John 17:17; I Thess. 4:1-8; 5:14-23). Truth has been entrusted to the assembly; therefore, faithful men should be appointed to handle the word of truth (II Tim. 2:2). Men with ordinary gifts are given to local assemblies for the edification of believers (Eph. 4:11-16), and these men should be recognized by the assemblies before their appointment (I Tim. 3:1-7). This is why behavior is emphasized in I Timothy 3:15.

The nature of Christ's assembly which He is building is

revealed in her invisible and visible aspects. The invisible aspect is the life principle; therefore, it is the great institution of unanimity—harmony and unity. Hence, one does not believe in Christ because he believes in the assembly, but he believes in Christ's assembly because he believes in Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which the assembly Christ is building can say, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Why? It is the invisible principle of life. Conversely, the visible aspect of the assembly would be heretical to say, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Why? That would be institutional salvation.

As the human nature of Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God, the local assembly is the visible manifestation of the invisible principle of life. Therefore, to say Jesus Christ was wholly spiritual in His first advent is to deny the incarnation; likewise, to say the assembly is wholly invisible is to repudiate her visibility. Furthermore, to deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ is to deny the new birth which is the principle of life coming by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Moreover, to say the assembly of Christ is only visible is the same principle as saying Jesus Christ is only human.

Since Jesus Christ and His assembly are both invisible and visible, Christ and His kingdom are both invisible and visible. The visibility of the kingdom at Christ's first advent was in the one born King, because it was in Him that "the kingdom of the heavens has approached [perfect active indicative of *eggidzo*]" (Matt. 3:2—translation). However, the invisible kingdom of heaven, which is presently with the Father, shall be given to the Son to be visibly manifested on the earth at Christ's second advent (Luke 19:11 ff). Furthermore, to say the kingdom is wholly spiritual and invisible is like saying Christ, His assembly, and His kingdom are wholly spiritual and invisible thus denying the visibility and materiality of

Christ's body, His assembly, and His kingdom. As God's purpose in the incarnation was accomplished, His purpose in both His assembly and His kingdom shall be accomplished.

There was only one place in Israel where God established His name (Deut. 12:5, 14, 18, 21, 26), and there is only one place in the New Testament where Christ has established His name (Rom. 16:16). In the Old Testament, the place was the tent of meeting; and in the New Testament, the place is the local assembly. God's name is associated with His chosen and redeemed people. Depraved men have no desire to fellowship with God; hence, left to their own choice, they will follow the god of this world. Who is depraved man to dictate God's chosen place for worship?

The place God chose to establish His name (Deut. 12:5) is contrasted with "all the places, wherein the nations...served their gods..." (Deut. 12:2). Men have almost forgotten that God has an assembly, and He has given it an order and constitution which is universally the same. God's people are under obligation to withdraw from everything that is contrary to God's order and constitution (II Tim. 2:19-22).

Christians must return to first principles. In a time of apostasy, we find few with whom we can walk in truth. But the truth itself is universal, and every believer is obligated to embrace it. There is a terrible gap between word and deed or proclamation and action. The passion for statistics is greater than the passion Paul expressed for the elect: "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Tim. 2:10). People who attend self-chosen places of worship want nothing to hinder their routine. Observe the way the Bible is used in self-chosen places.

The most popular Book in the world is the Bible. It is

popular to all self-serving religionists, but it becomes unpopular to the same people when they are subjected to the whole counsel of God. The following list shows the popularity and unpopularity of Scripture with religionists:

### **POPULAR**

1. God loves you  
(Eph. 2:4).
2. Salvation is of God  
(Phil. 1:28).
3. Judge not that you be not  
judged (Matt. 7:1).
4. If you ask anything in  
my name, I shall do it  
(John 14:13).
5. The blood of Jesus  
Christ cleanses us from  
all sin (I John 1:7).
6. The foundation of God  
has stood firm, having  
this seal (II Tim. 2:19a).
7. Love your enemies  
(Matt. 5:44).
8. Everyone has a right to  
his own belief  
(I Cor. 11:16).

### **UNPOPULAR**

1. God hates some  
(Rom. 9:13).
2. Faith does not regenerate  
(John 3:8).
3. Do you not judge the  
one inside the local  
assembly (I Cor. 5:12).
4. If we ask anything  
according to God's will,  
He is hearing us  
(I John 5:14).
5. Let us cleanse ourselves  
from all defilement of  
the flesh and spirit, per-  
fecting holiness in the  
fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).
6. Let everyone naming the  
name of the Lord keep  
away from evil (II Tim.  
2:19b).
7. Hate God's enemies with  
a mature hatred (Ps.  
139:21, 22).
8. Prove all things, and  
hold fast that which is  
good (I Thess. 5:21).

The list of approved and disapproved Scriptures among religionists could extend into the hundreds; but these examples should suffice to show the difference between one giving lip service to Scripture and the other saying with David, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.... Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:97, 104). Love for God's law is preceded by knowledge of God's law (*torah*, teaching or God's instruction for His people). How can we love that which we do not know? The very altitude of Holy Scripture reveals its Divine origin. Therefore, no one apart from the grace of God can scale the heights of God's mountain of revealed truth.

Human creeds reveal how much one knows; the word of God manifests how little one knows. Roman Catholicism has been justly criticized for her view concerning the Scriptures. Although admitting the Scriptures, Roman Catholics say they should be interpreted by the holy Mother, the church, who has held and holds the truth, and to whom belongs the responsibility of judging the true sense of the Scriptures. The rule of faith for the church of Rome consists of three parts: The Bible of the Romish church, tradition, and interpretation by the said church. Thus, she claims that such rule of faith banishes all doubts, resolves every dispute, and preserves unity. Granting that the criticism of Roman Catholicism is correct, a warning must be given concerning denominational creeds. Seeking to understand the suffering Savior and the assembly which He is building in the light of restricted creeds by men leads to subjectivism. The confessional life of the assembly must be tested by the unlimited sky of revelation rather than an artist's portrayal of a limited sky on canvas.

# 2

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## ISRAEL AND THE ASSEMBLY DISTINGUISHED

Systems of eschatology are characterized by various views on ecclesiology. One's belief about ecclesiology is reflected in his eschatological opinion. Therefore, error in one of these sciences leads to mistaken perception in the other. All systems of ecclesiology which contend that Christ's assembly is the new Israel of God have much in common in the realm of eschatology. Those who are basically in agreement that Christ's assembly is the new Israel of God are historicists. Futurists make a distinction between Israel and Christ's assembly. However, all futurists are not what is commonly classified as dispensational futurists. To identify them as such is the same as categorizing as amillennial all systems that teach Christ's assembly is the new Israel.

Many believe that Israel is Christ's assembly under the Old Testament, and Christ's assembly is the true Israel under the New Testament. The following are their major arguments: (1) They maintain that God first gave the name "Israel" to one man (Jacob) and then to one nation, which was a mere shadow of the full Israel, the Israel of God. (2) They say that as the

first Israel began with a man (Jacob), the new Israel also began with a Man (Jesus Christ), God's messenger of the covenant of grace. (3) They contend that God chose the national minority to point to the spiritual majority in Christ. Thus, in the fullness of time, God brought into the world One by whom "all Israel" (Jew and Gentile) would be saved. (4) They believe that Christ's kingdom was not of this world, but it was a spiritual kingdom established by God and given to Jesus Christ as His assembly, which is the new Israel of Scripture, the Israel of God. (5) They say that Christ brought a transfer from a physical to a spiritual nation. Their explanation is that the old Israel was "Israel after the flesh" (I Cor. 10:18), and this Israel was cast away (Rom. 11:15); hence, the house of the old was made desolate (Matt. 23:38), and the kingdom was given to another nation (Matt. 21:43). They assert that God took a new people with a new name, and the new people became the Israel of God. (6) They maintain that those who believe old Israel will be restored are building their hope for the future on a castaway. (7) They say that to speak of the restored Israel's salvation "by sight" is false, because the Jew must find Christ by faith now, or he will not be able to find Christ "by sight" tomorrow. (8) They affirm that people are deceived who talk about a physical kingdom in this world; and as the Pharisees of old, people who focus their eyes on national Israel may miss Christ.

Some among the historicists are much stronger in their denunciation of national Israel. They state that Israel of old has been reprobated forever and replaced by the assembly which is the new Israel. They accuse the Jews of being the cause of every major world problem. According to these historicists, the following are errors to be avoided: (1) The election of Israel is not based on physical birth, since the elect are the seed of Jesus Christ and not the seed of the Devil, as Christ said to the carnal Jews (John 8:44). (2) Prophecy does not make physical Israel the Israel of the New Testament;



references to Israel in the New Testament refer to true believers in Jesus Christ, while Gentiles and heathen are now the Hebrews and Old Testament carnal Israel. (3) We are God's elect due to being Christ's seed, not because we are Abraham's seed. (4) There is no Old Testament prophecy of the restoration of Israel to her land following her return from Babylon in the days of Nehemiah and Malachi. (5) The New Testament states that Jews do what they do for filthy money, and Judas is a perfect picture of the modern Zionist. (6) We are to beware of the concision, or mutilation (Phil. 3:2); therefore, Paul said the Jews were to be cut off (Gal. 5:12). They state that persons with improper understanding say we are to pray that God will graft the Jews in a physical and carnal sense and give them world dominion.

The aforementioned views must be exposed and answered from Scripture. Paul included three chapters in his Epistle to the Romans to discuss God's purpose for the nation of Israel (Rom. 9-11). He began by telling us who she is: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 9:3-5). "I could wish" is the imperfect middle indicative of *euchomai* which is correctly translated "I was wishing." It denotes a wishing which began and also stopped in the past. Although there is no indication when the wish occurred or how long Paul's wishing continued, there is one thing for sure—Romans 8 proves that it did not continue. Paul saw God's purpose pursuing its way through the strange mingling of light and shadow which mark the complexities of the checkered history of this chosen people. The apostle recognized at every turn the hand of the sovereign God and the amazing riches of His grace. Hence, he concluded his

discourse on Israel by saying, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Three great facts concerning Israel contributed to Paul’s adoring wonder at God’s dealings with that nation: (1) The chosen nation was rejected. (2) The Gentiles are being received. (3) Israel will be restored.

Because the nation of Israel was chosen by God from among all the nations of the world (Deut. 7:6-8), there was much hatred toward her. Nothing enrages the natural heart so much as the subject of Divine election, whether the choice is national or individual. God chose Israel to be the heir of special privileges and trained her through long centuries to discharge her task. Israel was the recipient of the covenants, the law, the true worship, and the promises; and the Savior’s human nature came through her. Israel’s unbelief was foreseen by God; it was foretold by the prophets; and God rejected the chosen nation. Nevertheless, He made provision for Israel in His plan. God’s sovereignty embraces the whole range of human history. Therefore, the depth of Paul’s message in Romans 11:33-36 is the depth of God’s riches, not the depth of a volcano full of horror and disaster. Paul did not answer with a counterargument on the same level of the assertion that God is arbitrary in His choice; rather, he rejected this abstract projection because he saw the situation to be altogether different. Election is not an arbitrariness in which no meaning can be found. It is the way by which God’s salvation is realized in human history. Therefore, the apostle said, “...For of him...are all things....”

The reception of the Gentiles was brought about by the fall of Israel. The Israelites to whom so much had been given stumbled into darkness. Christ's rejection of Israel was followed by His bringing in the Gentiles. Thus, the rejection of the chosen nation brought about "the reconciling of the world" (Rom. 11:15). God's purpose was not frustrated through the unbelief of the Jews any more than it will be frustrated by the failure of the assembly. His purpose will never fail: "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? Absolutely not! But you let God be true and every man a liar..." (Rom. 3:3, 4—translation). Hence, Paul could say that all things are "of," "through," and "to" God, and "God's ways are past finding out."

Israel shall be restored because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. The adjective *ametameleta* of Romans 11:29 is the nominative neuter plural of *ametameletos*, which means irrevocable. Paul had much to say about Israel's rejection, but his final word was not one of judgment but mercy. God's people have not been rejected with disapproval forever. When Jesus Christ informed the disciples He would baptize in the Holy Spirit, His disciples asked, "Lord, are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6—translation). The Lord Jesus replied that the time of the kingdom's restoration was not for them to know (v. 7). He did not tell them that the kingdom would never be restored to Israel. During the transitional period recorded in Acts, the message of repentance as a prerequisite to restoration was continuing to be proclaimed: "...the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; And He may send Jesus Christ, the One who has been appointed for you [Jews]: Whom it is necessary for heaven to receive until the times of restoring everything..." (Acts 3:19-21—translation).

The Jews' restoration will be followed by a work of spiri-

tual illumination. Paul foresaw the salvation of Israel in prophetic vision. On this note, the apostle concluded his discourse on Israel: “For God has shut up all in disobedience that he might show mercy to all” (Rom. 11:32 NASB). All things are “of” Him, “through” Him, and “to” Him. It has been said that the river whose strange windings have been traced pours its waters at last into the infinite sea of the glory of God. Some of God’s dealings are so clear that they can be easily traced and understood, but others are mysterious and beyond the range of human comprehension. But whether comprehended or apprehended, they lead every recipient of grace to the throne of the God of salvation. Only there, the believer finds rest from all his questioning and falls in humble submission before the sovereign God.

The assembly which Jesus Christ shall continue to build (progressive future active indicative of *oikodomeo*) (Matt. 16:18) must be distinguished from Jews and Gentiles. If Christ’s assembly is the new Israel, why did Paul distinguish them? “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church [assembly] of God” (I Cor. 10:32). Christ’s assembly is the living organism which Christ said He shall continue building. The only way to learn the difference between Israel and the assembly is to learn the meaning of the word “assembly” (church).

The word “assembly” (church) comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means a calling out. It is used 115 times in the New Testament, and it is used more than one way: (1) It is used in the sense of an assembly apart from any spiritual meaning (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). (2) It is used in the sense of a local assembly of Christians (Acts 8:1; I Cor. 1:2; I Thess. 1:1). (3) It is used when speaking of the body of Christ (Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:18, 24). (4) Among the 115 references to *ekklesia*, only one is used to refer to Israel. In Acts 7:38, Luke recorded Stephen’s defense (apology) before the high priest

in which he referred to Israel as the “church [assembly] in the wilderness”. In what sense is *ekklesia* used in this reference? It is a type of the New Testament assembly only in the local, not the universal sense. Luke did not contradict Matthew’s account in Matthew 16:18-19, where Matthew spoke of the universal aspect of the assembly. Luke used this as an illustration of the local aspect of the assembly; because in the local aspect, there are unsaved people, as there were in the assembly of Israel in the desert. Most of the Jews to whom Moses preached were disobedient. They rejected the oracles of God and turned back in their hearts to Egypt (Acts 7:39). God was not well-pleased with many of them. They lusted after evil things. Paul records in I Corinthians 10:1-11 that some of them were idolators, committed fornication, tested the Lord, and murmured. He used this to show the Corinthian assembly that the assembly in Israel was an example to local assemblies that the same sins are possible in them. Therefore, these things should be avoided. The assembly, which is the body of Christ, is represented as a virgin being prepared for marriage (II Cor. 11:2); whereas Israel is described as an unfaithful wife who will be restored (Hos. 1-3; Ezek. 16).

Many believe Christ’s assembly is the New Testament Israel of God, the one continuing body in the Old and New Testaments. They assume that the New Testament assembly is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning Israel; therefore, prophecy concerning the promised kingdom is to be understood in spiritual, not natural, terms. They contend that God chose the Jewish nation as the means of making Himself known to mankind; the nation was abandoned. Hence, they conclude that she is no longer an elect nation; Christ wrought a transfer from a physical assembly to a spiritual nation. Those who believe in an assembly/kingdom suppose that God cast away fleshly Israel and gave the kingdom to a new people who became the Israel of God, the assembly Christ is building.

Contrary to what the assembly/kingdom advocates claim, Paul did not have in mind the assembly as the “new Israel.” The assembly being “spiritual Israel” will not harmonize with his train of thought in either Romans or Galatians. Paul’s teaching in Romans reached a climax in Romans 8:28-34. He dealt with such great truths as God’s purpose, foreordination, predestination, calling, justification, glorification, election, and Christ’s death, resurrection, and intercession. Following these truths, the Holy Spirit led him to give something on the subject of election as it related to the nation of Israel.

The doctrine of Divine election differentiates Israel from Christ’s assembly. There was an internal (spiritual) election within the external (national) election of Israel: “...For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom. 9:6 NASB). The assembly, however, is the body of Christ by internal, spiritual election. Those elected to constitute Christ’s assembly, non-Jews as well as some Jews scattered among the nations, are called out of the world.

The Holy Spirit informed the Gentiles that God’s covenant was made with the Jews and not with them. The gospel was first given to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Furthermore, the elect Gentiles would be grafted “into a good olive tree” (Rom. 11:24). Election to salvation runs only in a certain line of Abraham’s seed, in Isaac, the child of promise (Rom. 9:7). “...Except the Lord of Sabaoth [Lord of the armies of Israel] had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah” (Rom. 9:29). The elect Gentiles are engrafted into the Israelite olive tree, the root of which remained untouched by apostasy because of the elective purpose of God. God did not repudiate His people whom He foreknew (Rom. 11:1, 2). Some think Romans 9-11 is parenthetical, but a closer look reveals it is closely connected with Romans 1:16-17—“...to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

The Galatian believers were reminded of a distinctive relationship that they sustained to the elect nation of Israel. They were shown that the promises and inheritance were given through Abraham, and Gentile believers are related to him by God's elective purpose (Gal. 3:14-18). The Epistle to the Galatians was written to Gentiles. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). (See Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6.) Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave this information to Gentile Christians to show them into what they had been grafted by the grace of the sovereign God.

The three senses in which Abraham's seed is viewed in Scripture must be considered at this point: (1) There is the natural seed of Abraham, which is not spiritual. Christ had a running debate with the unsaved Jews who claimed that because of their being Abraham's seed they were not in bondage to anyone (John 8:28-40). Christ acknowledged they were Abraham's seed; but they sought to kill Him; and that was something Abraham never did. (2) There is the spiritual seed of Abraham: "...they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6-8). (See Hebrews; I Pet. 1:1, 2.) (3) There is the spiritual seed of Abraham which is not his natural seed: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

There is a sharp distinction between Israelites and Gentiles in Romans 9-11, where there are twelve references to "Israel" (Rom. 9:6—twice, 27—twice, 31; 10:1, 19, 21; 11:2, 7, 25, 26), one to "Israelite" (Rom. 11:1), and one to "Israelites" (Rom. 9:4). Paul's discussion of national Israel is not interpreted in Romans 11:26, when he said, "all Israel shall be

saved.” Those who oppose the pre-kingdom coming of Christ say verse 26 refers to the totality of those to be saved, Jews and Gentiles who constitute the true Israel of God. They allege that Romans 11 indicates that the “fulness” of the Gentiles and “all Israel” make up the total number of that body which is called Christ’s assembly. However, there is no break in Paul’s concern for national Israel from his first reference to them in Romans 9:6 to Romans 11:26. The final support for the literal interpretation of Israel is the argument following the salvation of “all Israel” of verse 26. “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:28, 29). “Israel” remained a vital issue with the apostle because of the irrevocable gifts and calling of God. History will close with the people of Israel.

Paul’s prospect was Israel’s salvation. This salvation belongs to those who shall be living when “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). At that time “all Israel” shall be saved from her present dispersion. The Deliverer coming out of Zion does not refer to Christ’s first advent. The Roman Epistle was written subsequent to Christ’s first advent. It refers to a time following the writing of this Epistle. Christ’s first coming has not turned away ungodliness from Jacob (Israel), but His second coming will. (See Lev. 16:17-19; Is. 59:20, 21.) Therefore, Israel will yet be “received” as definitely and publicly as she is now rejected as a nation. During this time of Israel’s dispersion, every regenerated Jew is, like Paul, a proof that God in His election of grace is mindful of Israel.

There is a remnant of Israel at the present time, but there is a difference between the remnant in the first part of Romans 11 and “all Israel” in a coming day in the last part of Romans 11. Paul desired to see some from among his people saved



(Rom. 10:1). Those saved now are a part of Christ's assembly (Eph. 2:12-22).

Galatians 6:16 cannot be used to prove that Romans 11:26 is talking about Christ's assembly. Both verses are frequently misinterpreted. In Romans 9:6, Paul was not speaking of a distinction between Israel and the assembly but between believers and unbelievers among Abraham's natural seed. The apostle used the term "Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16 to speak of those who were once Israelites after the flesh, but by grace they are now the "Israel of God," that is, the spiritual children of Abraham: "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15—translation).



# 3

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## KINGDOM AND ASSEMBLY DISTINGUISHED

Many believe the terms “kingdom” and “assembly” (church) are synonymous. They say the kingdom includes the members of the assembly, and the assembly is composed of members of the kingdom. Others claim the assembly is the visible form of the kingdom of Christ, but some affirm that it is the invisible form while recognizing the invisible form has its visible forms. Thus, the heated debate continues without spiritual light.

The assembly may be understood in a twofold sense—universal assembly and local assemblies. But the kingdom cannot be divided into local kingdoms. The word assembly is used in the sense of including all who are being progressively added to the assembly by Jesus Christ. The verb “will build” of “I will [shall] build my church [assembly]” (Matt. 16:18) is progressive future active indicative of the verb *oikodomeo*. Hence, it denotes that Christ is continually building His assembly during the period of time between His two advents. The word assembly is also used in the sense of a local assembly (Matt. 18:15-20). Each local assembly has the

responsibility of assembling at God's appointed time to worship and solve her problems as they arise. Local assemblies may increase and diminish according to the circumstances of Divine providence, but the assembly Christ continues to build increases but never decreases. On the other hand, the word "kingdom" can never be used in the sense of local assemblies, because Christ does not have kingdoms in the sense that He has assemblies and walks among them (Rev. 1:13). The kingdoms of this world cannot be equated with the assemblies of Christ (Rom. 16:16). Scripture never states that the kingdoms salute Christ. There are only four references where the word kingdom is used in the plural number, and they refer to the kingdoms of this world (Matt. 4:8; Luke 4:5; Heb. 11:33; Rev. 11:15).

Christians belong to the assembly Christ is building, but we are heirs of the future kingdom. The noun *kleronomia* means property, possession, what is promised, or an inheritance. Paul used this noun when he spoke of the Holy Spirit being an earnest (*arrabon*, pledge or guarantee of what is to come) of a future deliverance (Eph. 1:14). He used the noun *kleronomos*, which means an heir, when he said, "And since children, also heirs; heirs on the one hand of God, joint-heirs on the other hand of Christ..." (Rom. 8:17—translation). Hence, the apostle proceeded from the possession to the possessors. An heir is one who is entitled to inherit something, but an heir of Christ's future kingdom is also assured by the Spirit of regeneration that he shall receive final deliverance into or will be kept safely for the kingdom which shall be forever. Local assemblies are in the present, but the kingdom is future.

God is the only actor in Ephesians 1:1-14—(1) The Father purposed; (2) the Son provided the means of carrying out the Father's purpose; and (3) the Holy Spirit is the quickener and pledge of the elect's complete salvation. As an heir legally

receives all the property assigned to him in a will, the elect of God shall receive all that God decreed for them in the death of Jesus Christ. (See Heb. 9:11-28.) As the elect receive eternal life by right of inheritance guaranteed by the death of Christ at Calvary, Christ lives as the executor to carry out His will: “By so much indeed Jesus has become [perfect active indicative of *ginomai*, which means Jesus has permanently become] a guarantor [*egguos*, an adjective acting as a noun, used only here in the New Testament as a pronominal adjective] of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22—translation). The unchanging character of Christ’s priesthood gives a permanent guarantee of a better covenant. The legal side of suretyship is stronger when the surety becomes the substitute for the debtor by having the debt charged to himself and the debtor released. Both eternal life and the kingdom are guaranteed to the elect. Scripture states, “then the King shall say to those on his right hand, Come, you who have been blessed [perfect passive participle of *eulogeo*, have been permanently blessed] of my Father, come into possession of the kingdom which has been prepared [perfect passive participle of *hetoimadzo*, which means has been permanently prepared] for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34—translation). The kingdom is permanently prepared because the sheep are permanently blessed. Those two perfect passive participles (completed action in past time with a resulting state of being) give Christian Jews and Gentiles a hope that will never make them ashamed (Matt. 25:34; I Thess. 2:12). Matthew spoke to Jews, telling them the kingdom is guaranteed to others than those to whom Jesus Christ spoke. His proclamation applies to the elect Jews and Gentiles to whom Christ will speak at His second advent.

An understanding of the nature of each, the kingdom and the assembly, will show that they cannot be synonymous terms. The following is a summary of the major views of the kingdom/assembly (kingdom/church) theory: (1) Roman

Catholics say the Roman Catholic Church is the visible kingdom of Christ on earth. (2) Reformers are united in the teaching that the assembly is universal and invisible. They take a firm stand against the Roman Catholic Church. (3) Many who are neither Roman Catholic nor Reformers say the assembly is the visible manifestation of God's kingdom on earth. Those who hold this view are divided between those who take a strict local concept and others who adopt the universal/local concept of the assembly. One thing they have in common is the erroneous view that the keys of the kingdom in Matthew 16:19 denote the authority given to the assembly to be exercised by her on the earth at the present time.

Having summarized the major views of the kingdom/assembly (kingdom/church) theory, we must categorically state that Christ's assembly can in no way be called a kingdom. The assembly is being called out; and as heirs of the kingdom, we are being prepared for the kingdom. Furthermore, the "keys of the kingdom" of Matthew 16:19 have no more to do with imperfect local assemblies than the Pope of Rome has to do with the assembly Christ is continuing to build.

Those who misunderstand the nature of the kingdom have, according to their view of Matthew 11:12, the passive unregenerate forcefully entering the kingdom. Some say that since the gospel of the kingdom has been preached, there is a rush to it. However, Christ said, "And you will not come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40—translation); and "No one is able to come to me, unless the Father who sent me may draw him" (John 6:44—translation). "...There is not one who seeks after God" (Rom. 3:11—translation). Hence, the unregenerate are without hope in the coming kingdom, because the King Himself has no attraction to them. "For everyone practicing evil things hates the light, and does not come to the light, in order that his works may not be exposed" (John 3:20—translation). During the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Preacher of

all preachers spoke a parable in which He pointed out what the unregenerate think of His rule—"We do not desire this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14—translation).

Substitution of the term kingdom (*basileia*, which is ruling) for assembly (*ekklesia*, which is a calling out), or vice versa, where they are found in the New Testament will prove they are not synonymous terms. There are twelve references to the kingdom in the assembly Epistles, and to substitute the word assembly for the kingdom or to speak of the kingdom/assembly (kingdom/church) will in each instance demonstrate how ridiculous it is to make the terms one and the same. The following are some examples of such substitutions:

1. Substitute *basileia* for *ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18—"...thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my 'kingdom'..." Since "I will build" is the translation of a progressive future tense Greek verb, how can Jesus Christ, according to those who say the kingdom has arrived, continually build what He has already received from the Father? (See Luke 19:11-15; II Tim. 4:1.)

2. Substitute *basileia* for *ekklesia* in Philippians 3:4 and 6—"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more.... Concerning zeal, persecuting the 'kingdom' ...." How could Paul have persecuted the kingdom of which he later said, "And the Lord shall rescue me from every wicked work, and shall preserve [future active indicative of *sodzo*, which means to save, deliver, or keep one safe for] me for his heavenly kingdom..." (II Tim. 4:18—translation).

3. Substitute *ekklesia* for *basileia* in Luke 12:32—"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure [*eudokesen*, aorist active indicative of *eudokeo*, which means to take pleasure in, choose, or determine] to give you the

‘assembly’.” The Father chose (determined) to give the kingdom to His little flock already being called into the assembly. Therefore, as members of Christ’s assembly which He is building, we are heirs of the kingdom. (See James 2:5; II Pet. 1:10, 11.)

4. Substitute *ekklesia* for *basileia* in Matthew 16:19—“And I will give unto thee the keys of the ‘assembly’ of heaven.” If the authority denoted by the keys of the kingdom is given to the assemblies of God’s people today, does that mean that whatever the assembly binds on earth is then bound in heaven and whatever the assembly shall loose on earth shall then be loosed in heaven? The King James translation of the Greek text of this verse has been responsible for much heresy. Is God’s action in heaven His reaction to our action on earth? Since this is commonly taught in professing Christendom, no wonder religionists are saying the sinner must open his heart, let Jesus in, etc. However, the Scriptures teach that man’s action on earth is his reaction to God’s action in heaven. Any honest student of Scripture knows that both “bound in heaven” and “shall be loosed in heaven” are perfect passive participles of the Greek verbs *deo* and *luo*, which should be translated “shall have already been bound in the heavens” and “shall have already been loosed in the heavens.” Anyone who thinks God’s action is contingent on man’s action does not understand the sciences of theology (God), anthropology (man), or soteriology (salvation).

The kingdom is not given to the elect at the time we are born of God; but having become believers, we are said to be called to something not yet realized in Christian experience. Being members of Christ’s assembly, Christians are heirs commanded to be diligent in making our calling and election sure, because in so doing an entrance shall be richly provided for us into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:10, 11). The chosen, redeemed, and regener-



ated are legally in the kingdom (Col. 1:13) before actually inheriting it (James 2:5). Every elect person legally but not literally died with Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20). When Christ died, His righteousness was imputed to every individual for whom He died. That righteousness is imparted to the elect ones in regeneration. Since it could never be said the “assembly” is the heir of the “assembly” or the “kingdom” is the heir of the “kingdom,” we understand that Jesus Christ gave Himself for the assembly which He is calling out by the Holy Spirit in order that He shall, at her completion, reign with her in the kingdom.

The *ekklesia* represents what Jesus Christ is doing between His two advents. Luke gave a report of the Jerusalem conference in which we learn what is presently taking place and what is the prophetic hope of God’s people (Acts 15:13-18). Some Jewish believers insisted on the necessity of circumcising Gentiles. The Jews were slow to learn that the law was given not to be kept for salvation but to prove it could not be kept for that purpose, because “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Although deliverance from sin presupposes a bondage in which all mankind is involved, salvation is not a reward of merit but the gift of grace.

At some future point in time, Jesus Christ shall personally return (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11). Not one of the eight references to the kingdom in the book of Acts refers to an established kingdom. In Acts 15:16, the “return” is as literal as the “tabernacle [tent] of David.” Christ’s present ministry as high Priest is not connected with David’s throne but with the Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21). It is true that in Acts 15 James was dealing with a problem concerning the early assembly. But he was also making a prophetic statement subsequent to the age of the assembly; therefore, he referred to the visible, personal return of Jesus Christ. James dealt with the fact that elect Jews and Gentiles saved following the first advent of

Jesus Christ constitute the assembly. Furthermore, the assembly plus elect Jews and Gentiles who will be saved in preparation for and at the time of the establishment of the kingdom at Christ's second advent will culminate Christ's work (Acts 15:14-18; Rev. 7:4-17).

Since several views of Acts 15:14-18 are given by students of prophecy, we will not discuss those at this point in our study of the kingdom of God. However, two important things must be pointed out: (1) The *ekklesia* is being built by God taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name (v. 14). (2) God shall rebuild David's destroyed tent or tabernacle some time in the future. Therefore, the rebuilding of David's tent cannot be, as many affirm, the assembly which God is using to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Jesus Christ gave Himself for the assembly, and He also made provision for her spiritual growth. The local aspect of the assembly was weak in assembly government at her inception and early history because she lacked a constituted form of government (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; 20:28-30; Eph. 4:11-16; I Tim. 5:17-19; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Furthermore, local assemblies can never reach the stature of strength under human government executed by imperfect servants in local assemblies which the completed assembly shall experience under the perfect government by Jesus Christ during the kingdom (Is. 9:6).

Election cannot pass from Israel to the assembly, thus making the assembly the new Israel of God. God elected not only the nation of Israel, but He also elected some to salvation from within national Israel. The Gentiles chosen to salvation are grafted into the root (spiritual Israel) (Rom. 11:17-19) in order to partake of her spiritual blessings. Hence, God's election of some to salvation in Christ cannot pass from them to others any more than grace can pass from one to another.

Whatever God purposed shall be done; therefore, all He purposed to save were foreordained, predestinated, and will be called, justified, and glorified because they were given grace in Jesus Christ before the beginning of time (Rom. 8:28-30; II Tim. 1:9).

Election is used more than one way in Scripture; therefore, one kind of election cannot transfer to another of a different kind. For instance, the choice of national Israel cannot be transferred to the assembly. The purpose of God is fulfilled in each sense in which election is used. Observe a few ways election is used in Scripture: (1) Jesus Christ was chosen to be the good Shepherd, great Shepherd, and chief Shepherd of the ones He chose to be His sheep (I Pet. 2:4, 6; Ps. 22-24; John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 5:4). (2) The nation of Israel was chosen to a covenant relationship for the purpose of giving both the incarnate Word and the written word (Rom. 1:3, 4; 3:1, 2). Furthermore, the nation was chosen with a view to the kingdom. Conclusively, the covenants and the promises were given to the Jews (Rom. 9:4, 5). Salvation was first given to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The chosen Gentiles shall inherit the future kingdom with the chosen descendants of Abraham. (3) Some are chosen from among all mankind to be redeemed by Christ, to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and to become heirs of the kingdom. "Blessed is the man whom thou [the Lord] choosest..." (Ps. 65:4). Christ calls His own sheep by name (John 10:3, 16). (4) God's choice sometimes signifies the temporary designation of some person or persons to the filling of some particular office in either a local assembly or in civil life, such as Judas in the former (John 6:70) and Saul in the latter (I Sam. 10:24). Who can say that any one of these choices has failed or will fail to accomplish God's eternal purpose. Although God's purpose has been fulfilled in both Judas and Saul, no one, according to Romans 11 and Revelation 7, can say that God's purpose in national Israel has been fulfilled.

Jesus Christ has gone to heaven to receive the kingdom, not the assembly, from the Father. There is as little agreement concerning the beginning of the kingdom as there is concerning the meaning of the kingdom. Some believe the kingdom began with Christ's first advent; others, that it began on the day of Pentecost; and some, that it shall begin at the second advent. The kingdom has not been manifested, because the Father's purpose was that His Son should be honored and glorified in heaven before He should be honored on earth. When Christ takes up the kingdom, it will not be from the earthly but the heavenly side. Thus, Luke 19 emphasizes the Lord's being received up into heaven. He has gone to heaven to receive His kingdom from the Father, not from religionists who are always talking about bringing in the kingdom.

The parable of the nobleman was added to Christ's message concerning the purpose of His first advent. Following His declaration that He came "to seek and to save that which has been lost [*apololos*, perfect active participle of *apollumi*, to lose or to be lost]" (Luke 19:10—translation), Christ represented Himself as a nobleman who "went to a far country to receive [*labein*, aorist active infinitive of *lambano*, to receive, to obtain the right to] for Himself [*heauto*, dative masculine singular pronoun of *heautou*, a reflexive pronoun meaning Himself which makes the middle voice possible] a kingdom, and to return" (Luke 19:12—translation).

Christ's second coming is the blessed hope of the assembly (Titus 2:13). The Christian's hope includes Christ's coming and His kingdom which are amalgamated in II Timothy 4:1. If the kingdom were already present, as many claim, "hope being seen is not hope; for what anyone sees, why does he also hope for it?" (Rom. 8:24—translation). Those who say the kingdom does not come with observation add more confusion to what is already confusing to them by saying this proves it is a spiritual kingdom. Hence, they have an unseen

spiritual king reigning over an unseen spiritual kingdom composed of unseen spiritual subjects. Conclusively, in the distinction between the kingdom and the assembly, how can people who say they are already in the kingdom pray for its coming? Christ taught His disciples to pray, “Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done as in heaven also on earth” (Matt. 6:10—translation). Christ’s kingdom will not come to the earth until He has completed His assembly. The Christians’ blessed hope of Jesus Christ and His kingdom will never make us ashamed.

During the first advent of Jesus Christ, the Savior set aside national Israel until His second advent. According to Matthew 16, the Jews were cognizant of the signs of the weather; but they were spiritually incapable of discerning the signs relating to the Person of Jesus Christ. Natural intelligence can understand natural phenomena, but the spiritual mind alone can comprehend spiritual facts concerning the Person and Work of the Son of the living God. The first verses of Matthew 16 manifest the blindness of the religiously depraved hearts of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Christ had told them that no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:39, 40). This was a prophecy of His death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, no greater sign can be given to validate His Person and Work thus proving that “salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).



# 4

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## FOUNDATION OF THE ASSEMBLY MADE KNOWN

The Father made known to the disciples that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the assembly: “Now Jesus having come into the districts of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, saying, Who are men saying the Son of man to be? And they said, Some indeed John the Baptist; and others Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He says to them, But who do you say Me to be? And answering, Simon Peter said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And answering, Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in the heavens” (Matt. 16:13-17—translation). The subject of the first twenty verses of Matthew 16, which close the first half of the Gospel of Matthew, is the presentation of the King. The subject of the second half of his Gospel, which includes Matthew 16:21-28:20, is the rejection of the King. The first verses of Matthew 16 show the religious Jews coming to Jesus Christ to test Him. They wanted to see a sign (*semeion*, miraculous sign or miracle), something spectacular that defied nature. These religionists knew how to discern the sky, but they were not spiritually illuminated to discern the

signs of the times. The Lord Jesus told them an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, and the only sign that would be given was the one about which He had already told them. He referred them to the Old Testament record concerning Jonah being in the belly of the whale three days and three nights and applied the experience to His being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The Lord Jesus then commanded the disciples to be on guard concerning the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v. 12). Christians must be on guard concerning the fermenting power of false teaching.

The difference between observation and revelation is recorded in Matthew 16:13-17. Christ's first question, "Who are men saying the Son of man to be?" (v. 13—translation), is related to observation. Observation is the act of noticing or perceiving by men. The Lord Jesus, coming to the conclusion of His earthly ministry with Israel until the end time, asked this question. The Lord had previously given the disciples the commission to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5, 6). The Pharisees called Him Beelzebub, and some of them accused Him of being born of fornication. He did not ask who the Jews thought Him to be but who men thought Him to be. The word "men" lifts the question above all national distinctions to men out from all nations; hence, all national distinctions are excluded from the question.

The observations by men are disclosed in the disciples' answer to Christ's question (Matt. 16:14). Although the observations were not unfavorable, they were incorrect because they were observations by men apart from spiritual discernment by the Holy Spirit. Men thought Him to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

Christ's second question, "He says [present active indicative of *lego*] to them [*autois*, third person plural of *autos*], But



who do you [*humeis*, nominative second person plural] say Me to be?" (Matt. 16:15—translation), brought forth Peter's answer (vv. 16, 17). The plural of the word "you" proves that all the disciples were questioned. Peter, the spokesman for the disciples, confessed Christ as the Son of the living God; and Christ commended him for his confession. Peter's confession was the fruit of Divine revelation, not a human belief and understanding of Scripture. A person may be humanly correct and yet be a stranger to God's grace.

Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16—translation). His statement included the truths of Christ's human nature, His office, and His eternity. The human nature assumed by Jesus Christ was anointed, and the anointing refers to His office. "The Son of the living God" denotes His eternity. This confession was not the result of carnal reasoning (I Cor. 2:11). Peter was unable to see through the veil of Christ's human nature to behold His Divine nature. Therefore, the Father spiritually enlightened Peter, and spiritual things have the influence of reality on renewed minds.

A true conversion experience is impossible apart from the reality of the truth of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The word "conceive" best illustrates the truth of a true conversion experience. Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary some thirty years before He was conceived in the mind of Peter. The conception in both the womb and the mind was by the Holy Spirit. Understanding in the mind is as important to a conversion experience as the conception in the womb by the Holy Spirit was to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Since Peter's mind had been renewed by grace, the Father made known to his renewed mind that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; and that truth became a reality to Peter. When Christ becomes real to the one who has been spiritually renewed by the grace of God, that person is different and has a foundation on which his life is built.

Peter confessed the Lord as Israel's Christ—anointed—and Jesus Christ announced Himself as the assembly's Savior—"I shall continue to build [progressive future active indicative of *oikodomeo*] my assembly" (Matt. 16:18—translation). Peter asserted the Deity as well as the humanity of Christ in his confession. Christ was anointed with reference to His humanity. "The Son of the living God" (v. 16) refers to His Deity. Men know no more of Jesus Christ than they see and value in Him.

The Lord Jesus replied to Peter's confession, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in the heavens" (Matt. 16:17—translation). The word "blessed" (*makarios*) means happy or blessed. The Lord's use of this term with reference to His people is a high and rare privilege for us. Christ gave Simon Barjona the name of Peter. This change of name was promised in John 1:42, and it was bestowed in Matthew 16:18. The Lord Jesus used the double name to show Peter what he was originally and what he had become by grace—a stone. The changing of names in the Bible is important. Abram's name was changed to Abraham—the friend of God; and Jacob's name was changed to Israel—the prince of God.

The Father, not flesh and blood, made known the truth to Peter that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. There are two major views of "flesh and blood." Some think the statement refers to Christ Himself rather than to man. They assume that Christ was calling attention to the fact that His lowly appearance in flesh had not revealed this truth. The correct view is that man did not reveal this to Peter.

The Greek word for "make known" is *apokalupto*, a compound word. The prefix *apo* means from, and the suffix *kalupto* means to cover, hide, or conceal. Within the 26 times this compound verb occurs, it is used five basic ways: (1) to

uncover what has been covered (Matt. 10:26), (2) to make known or give spiritual discernment (Matt. 11:27; 16:17), (3) to distinctively declare (Rom. 1:17, 18), (4) to set forth (Gal. 3:23), and (5) to be manifested or appear (II Thess. 2:3, 6, 8; Rom. 8:18). The noun form *apokaluphis* is found 19 times.

The verb *apokalupto* is used in Matthew's account of the Lord's reaction to His rejection (Matt. 11:25-30). After the return of the seventy sent by the Lord to the house of Israel, Jesus Christ acknowledged with praise what the Father had done. The Father had concealed the truth concerning Jesus Christ from the learned and intelligent and made it known to immature ones: "At [*En*, locative of time] that time [*kairo*] Jesus answering said, I am praising [present middle indicative of *exomologeō*], you, Father, Lord of the heavens and of the earth, because you concealed [aorist active indicative of *kruptō*, which means to conceal or keep secret] these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed [*apekaluphas*, aorist active indicative of *apokaluptō*] them to immature ones" (Matt. 11:25—translation).

All truth originated in God (Eph. 3:9; I Cor. 2:7-9). God reveals some but not all truth. Recorded in Holy Scripture is all the truth God wants us to know, but all truth is not contained in the written word of God. The things concealed belong to God, but the things revealed belong to God's people: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). The unregenerate cannot understand spiritual things because God has concealed truth from them.

God concealed truth from reprobates: "But you are not believing, because you are not from my sheep..." (John 10:26—translation). If there is no reprobation, there is no election. If there is no election, there is no grace. If there is

no grace, there is no salvation. If there is no salvation, there is no body of Christ that Jesus Christ is presently building. Reprobation is God's sovereign, unconditional decree to damn some sinners. But He damns reprobates because of their sin. This is positive reprobation. Negative reprobation has to do with God's passing by those He did not elect. They are not condemned by God's passing by, but they are condemned because all are sinners. God chose some sinners out from depravity to manifest His grace, but He left some to manifest His justice.

The Father fully knows the Son, and the Son fully knows the Father. All men know God's power and deity (Rom. 1:19, 20), but only the elect know God experientially because Jesus Christ desired to make known the Father to those the Father gave Him in the covenant of redemption (Matt. 11:27). For those persons, Jesus Christ died. He died for the sheep, not all mankind.

The apostle Paul used the verb *apokalupto* to refer to God's making known His Son in him in order that he might preach the gospel (Gal. 1:16). Here is a classic example of God's making known His truth to some. Paul was first set apart in the sphere of God's eternal purpose. He was also separated from the womb. He was separated in regeneration; and then, in a conversion experience. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Hence, his separation did not begin when he chose to believe. Paul's births, both physical and spiritual, were without his cooperation. Salvation is of God apart from human merit, will, or action.

God's making known His Son in Paul was subjective. The Holy Spirit works subjectively in giving recipients of grace the ability to understand spiritual things. The Father makes known to the elect subjectively the same Son revealed objectively in Scripture. The gospel we preach is to be proclaimed

objectively to mankind indiscriminately. But objective truth is made known subjectively by the Lord Himself to the elect who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. God gives the elect spiritual discernment that we might understand spiritual things.

Distinction must be made between objective and subjective revelation: (1) One is general; the other is specific. (2) One is external; the other is internal. (3) One reaches the intellect; the other reaches the understanding and proceeds to the affections. (4) The objective message is incomprehensible to the ones who have not been quickened by the Holy Spirit. The subjective message will become comprehensible and a realization to the regenerate.

The truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, which before was unknown to Peter, was made known to him. The revelation from God the Father by means of the Holy Spirit is necessary to make known to anyone that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The revelation made known to Peter was complete, but it was not the complete revelation of God. The complete revelation of God has never been made known to men. It will take all eternity to see Jesus Christ in His true character. The context of Matthew 16 proves that Peter's knowledge was limited. When Christ told him that He must suffer, die, and be resurrected, Peter said, "May God be merciful to you, Lord! This shall by no means happen to you" (v. 22—translation).

Peter's confession was commended by Jesus Christ, because it came from a spiritually enlightened mind. All religious affections are not attended with conviction, because they are not produced by the spiritual illumination of the mind. Spiritual affections spring from the beauty of Divine principles. Their beauty is discerned through the illumination of the mind. This produces the conviction of their reality

because spiritual things have the influence of reality on the renewed mind. As worldly actions are motivated by worldly affections, spiritual actions are motivated by spiritual affections. Love for the world results in worldly activities, which are forbidden by the Lord (I John 2:15-17). Love for Jesus Christ results in spiritual activities. Love is not only the chief affection, but it is also the fountain of all the affections. The love of the unsaved is selfish and self-centered, but the love of the saved is unselfish and Christ-centered. As there is no worldly affection without worldly wisdom, there is no spiritual affection without spiritual wisdom. The degree of one's affection is determined by the degree of his knowledge. Peter's knowledge of Jesus Christ was by Divine illumination. He had been taught by God (John 6:45). God's love, which has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit of regeneration, gives us spiritual desires, spiritual affections, and motivates us to spiritual activity.

# 5

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## BIRTH OF THE ASSEMBLY

No subject, apart from the Godhead, should be of greater importance to the Christian than that of Christ's assembly. However, it is a subject about which there is great controversy. The many divisions in professing Christendom result from arguments over the Greek word *ekklesia*. How can one word that seems clear in meaning be so controversial? The answer can be given in one simple statement, "Satan is the enemy of the assembly." On the other hand, that simple answer creates a complex problem. Thus, one finds himself right back where he started. Since Satan is the enemy of the assembly, he is the great deceiver. Furthermore, there is nothing so false and deceitful as the human heart (Jer. 17:9). The heart of man is so deceitful that while misrepresenting outward objects it tries to conceal its own true character. Human prejudices, traditions, and opinions hinder even believers from recognizing the full truth, plus the fact that most professing believers have never been made alive by the quickening Spirit.

Some people trace the *ekklesia* to a man, and some trace it to Pentecost. Many Baptists trace their beginning to John the

Baptist; Roman Catholics, to Peter as the first pope; Lutherans, to Martin Luther; Methodists, to John Wesley; and Mormons, to Joseph Smith. Others who trace their origin to a man might be included. Many denominationalists and non-denominationalists trace their origin to Pentecost. In contrast, true assemblies trace their origin to Jesus Christ, the One who instituted the universal aspect of the assembly (Matt. 16:18, 19), which is represented by local assemblies. Matthew traced the *ekklesia* to all the saved who Jesus Christ is calling out by the regenerating Holy Spirit. Luke, unlike Matthew, used the word *ekklesia* in Acts 7:38 to speak of the assembly of Israel, which typifies the local aspect of the assembly. Only the saved are in the universal aspect, but both saved and unsaved are in the local aspect of the assembly.

The word assembly (*ekklesia*) means many things to different people. Some of the major theories will be considered:

FIRST—Roman Catholics teach the universal-visible view of the assembly. According to them, the assembly is made the mother of believers. As such, she becomes the dispenser of grace. Rome actually defines the assembly as the society of the faithful under the Pope's headship. Catholics are taught to depend on the living, speaking voice of the assembly. Thus, to them the Roman Catholic Church is the interpreter of Scripture. Catholics do not question the Bible as God-given, but they insist that the Scriptures within themselves are not sufficient.

SECOND—The Church of England embraces the territorial theory of the assembly. According to Anglicanism, the assembly is territorial, governed by the Episcopacy. The word "comprehensive" is the peculiar characteristic of the National Church of England.

THIRD—Denominational assemblies are institutions that



are subject to the hierarchy of each particular denomination. Some denominations are represented as believing in the autonomy of the local assembly, but what they advocate and what they actually practice are two different things. However, the degree of control varies from one denomination to another.

FOURTH—Protestant assemblies of the reformation formulated the theory of the universal and local, or invisible and visible, concept of the assembly to counteract the Roman Catholic theory of the universal-visible assembly. They taught that membership in the universal assembly qualified persons for membership in the local assembly. After the reformation, some stressed the universal assembly to the exclusion of the local. They used that idea as an escape from the troubles in the local assemblies and denominations. Others went to the opposite extreme.

FIFTH—Some adopt the visible-kingdom view of the assembly. Among those who hold to the strict local concept of the assembly, some believe the assembly is the visible manifestation of the kingdom on earth. They are of the opinion that anyone who denies that the institution called the “kingdom of God and the assembly of Christ” was established by Christ while He was on earth is an enemy of Christ and Christianity. They use assembly and kingdom as synonymous terms.

SIXTH—There are other strict localists who make a distinction between the assembly and the kingdom, but they teach that one is heretical to say the assembly is both universal and local, or invisible and visible. Some Baptists teach that during His personal ministry, Christ founded their assembly or denomination.

SEVENTH—The assembly of Jesus Christ should be re-

garded as invisible and visible. This Scripturally correct view is not dualism, a theory that there are two basic principles. The invisible and visible are two aspects of the one principle of life given by Christ to His people. The difference is between the principle of life and the manifestation of that life. As the principle of life dwells in a dying body, the invisible life of grace dwells in a dying local assembly. All the local assemblies mentioned in the Bible are dead, but the principle of life that animated them is not dead. In fact, the Spirit of life in each believer who made up those local assemblies is very much alive and was a part of the local assembly's existence. Christ said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). He said to His disciples, "...because I live, ye shall live [future active indicative of *dzao*] also" (John 14:19). This latter view is that of the author, and it will be further established in the study of Christ's Assembly.

God did not leave Himself without a witness in the world after setting Israel aside. According to Acts 14:17, God has never been without a witness. Therefore, during Christ's personal ministry, the Lord Jesus established His assembly and committed to her the responsibility of making Himself known through the ministry of the word. Since God must be made known in the world for the purpose of calling out the elect to Himself, He has chosen to be made known by the *ekklesia*, the assembly, which Christ is continuing to build.

The progressive future tense of the verb *oikodomeo*, "I will build," is used in Matthew 16:18 in the Lord's statement to Peter concerning Christ's building His assembly. This is what is known in the Greek as a progressive future active indicative verb, signifying that the Lord Jesus Christ has not completed His assembly. Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles, succeeded the twelve apostles; and he and all who have been saved since that time are part of the assembly Jesus Christ is continuing

to build. The Lord Jesus will continue building His assembly until the last one that will constitute the assembly is brought into the ark of safety. In order to accomplish the purpose for which she was established, the assembly must use only the means set forth in the word of God. Suggesting that the assembly of Christ has been sent into the world without a divine compass—the word of God—and chart to direct her course is unthinkable. God’s compass and chart are not to be replaced by man-made programs and gimmicks.

There is little agreement among Christians as to when the assembly was founded and how she was established. Some say the birth of the assembly took place at Pentecost. Others contend that she was established during Christ’s personal ministry. Those who believe the assembly began at Pentecost say her birth must be preceded by the following events:

1. They say the death of Christ must be history; thus, the cornerstone was already laid.
2. They say Christ’s resurrection provided the assembly with resurrection life; therefore, the gates of Hades have been opened.
3. They say Christ had ascended to the Father’s right hand; therefore, the assembly’s Head had assumed His proper place.
4. They say there could be no assembly on earth until the Holy Spirit came to baptize repentant persons into Christ’s body and indwell the assembly.
5. They say according to Christ’s prediction, the formation of the assembly was future.
6. They say that if the assembly existed before the death of

Christ, it would have died.

7. They say the true assembly must have the finished work of Christ on which to stand, the resurrection position, and a new humanity with its resurrected Head.

Although a large percentage of believers embrace the view that the assembly was born at Pentecost, Biblical evidence will not support that view. When Christ's suffering at Calvary was accomplished, He had already called His disciples during His public ministry (Matt. 16:13-18). Furthermore, Jesus Christ commissioned these disciples—the assembly (Matt. 28:18-20)—who constituted the secondary foundation of the assembly. He gave to this infant assembly a foretaste of the power she would experience at Pentecost (John 20:19-23).

The opinion of some is that the assembly was formed at Pentecost, and they emphasize the word “formed.” But that view will not hold up in the light of the calling of the disciples, their being commissioned, and their receiving power prior to Pentecost. The mistake is made not primarily in their use of the word “formed,” but in what the word includes. The Holy Spirit came in power only on the Jews in Acts 2, on the Samaritans in Acts 8, and on the Gentiles in Acts 10. The gospel is to be preached first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans who were mixed—part Jews and part Gentiles—then to the Gentiles. Hence, Pentecost did not stop with the Jews, but it also included the Samaritans and Gentiles, thus harmonizing with Leviticus 23.

Some compare the formation and birth of the assembly to the formation of Adam's body before God breathed life into him. They emphasize the difference between the formation and life of Adam. No Christian denies that man's body was first formed, and then the breath of life was breathed into it (Gen. 2:7). However, using this exact analogy to speak of

Christ's assembly as being formed by Christ and later receiving life at Pentecost is missing the Biblical significance of Pentecost. If that analogy were correct, the disciples would have gone out preaching without life. How could they receive the power of life if they did not have life?

The assembly was formed during Christ's earthly ministry, but the suggestion that the infusion of the principle of life must wait until Pentecost is unscriptural. The assembly which Christ formed was composed of regenerated persons who had been effectually called by Christ Himself. The command to wait for the promise of the Father had nothing to do with the principle of life which they already possessed (Acts 1:1, 5). They were not formed and waiting for life; they had life. They were to wait until they were "endued [aorist middle subjunctive of *enduo*, clothed or invested] with power [*dunamis*, power or supernatural power]..." (Luke 24:49), not until they had life.

The idea that Christ's death must be history before the formation of the assembly misses an important point concerning the death of Christ. If that concept were true, Christ's high priestly prayer of John 17 would have been invalid; however, it was not invalid because He said, "...having completed [aorist active participle of *teleioo*] the work which you have given [perfect active indicative of *didomi*] me to do" (John 17:4—translation). From man's perspective, Christ had not finished His work because He had not actually died. But from God's perspective, it was completed. He calls those things not existing as existing. (See Rom. 4:17.) Jesus Christ is the Lamb having been slain [perfect passive participle of *sphadzo*] from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Since the atonement cannot be dated from God's viewpoint, Jesus Christ could call out His own, establish His assembly, and commission her on the basis of His timeless death.

Resurrection life was the blessing of God's elect before the actual death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The three Jesus Christ raised from the dead had a foretaste of resurrection life. Christ said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep [perfect passive indicative of *koimao*, to fall asleep or die]; but I go, that I may awaken [aorist active subjunctive of *exupnidzo*, to waken from sleep] him out of sleep" (John 11:11 NASB). Subsequent to Lazarus' experience of spiritual resurrection, he experienced physical death; and he was about to experience a physical resurrection. All of this was before the death of Christ. The word "friend" in John 11:11 comes from the Greek word *philos*, which means loved or friend. He was loved by Mary and Martha; but most of all, he was loved by Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ did not have to die, be resurrected, and ascend to the Father's right hand in order for the elect to be quickened by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Himself quickened some (John 5:21). The opinion that the assembly could not exist until the Holy Spirit came to baptize repentant believers into the body of Christ is unscriptural. One cannot Scripturally equate baptism in the Holy Spirit with regeneration. Baptizing in the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost on those who were disciples: they had been quickened; they had been called; and they had received a foretaste of Pentecost.

One must not make the mistake of thinking that Peter and the other apostles were void of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. "Being then evening, on that day, the first of the week, and the doors having been shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace to you. And having said this, He showed them both His hands and side. Then the disciples rejoiced, having seen the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, Peace to you; as my Father has sent me, I also am sending you. And saying this, He breathed on them, and says to them, Receive [aorist

active imperative of *lambano*, you receive at once] the Holy Spirit” (John 20:19-22—translation). The disciples, who were passive in their regeneration (John 3:3, 5, 7; I John 3:9; 5:1, 4), were commanded to receive an added degree of the power of the Spirit to enable them to exercise their office by declaratively revealing whether their sins were or were not forgiven. They were passive in regeneration, but they were active in receiving the Spirit. The aorist active of *lambano* means they participated in the receiving. God never gives anything that is not received. In other words, they were commanded to receive a foretaste of Pentecost by receiving at once the Holy Spirit who had already been breathed on them. They were Christians because they were active in receiving. To apply the aorist active imperative of receive to the disciples receiving life 50 days later is inconsistent with the principle of life that is given to the passive sinner.

There are only seven references in the New Testament to baptism in the Holy Spirit: Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; I Corinthians 12:13. This baptism is always collective, never individual. Matthew 3:11 through Acts 1:5 are all prophetic of Pentecost. Acts 11:16 and I Corinthians 12:13 record the event of history. The Holy Spirit is the One in whom Christ baptized. Jesus Christ, not the Holy Spirit, is the baptizer in all the references. One may argue that this cannot be proved, since Christ’s name is not mentioned in I Corinthians 12:13. However, His name is used in the other six; furthermore, He is the One who baptized His assembly into the sphere of the Spirit even in I Corinthians 12:13. That which occurred subsequent to Acts 2 explains the use of the future tense in Acts 11:16. When the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles, Peter remembered what Christ had promised in Acts 1:5. Therefore, he was quoting the future passive indicative verb used by Christ in His promise to the disciples. The diligent student of Scripture will have no problem seeing from the grammatical use of the verb tenses

the truth of the assembly being empowered in order to fulfill the commission of Matthew 28.

The reason for so much misunderstanding about Pentecost is failure to see that there are three parts to the feast of weeks which foreshadowed Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-22). Pentecost signifies fifty days from Passover. Hence, fifty days from the death of Christ, the Holy Spirit came as Jesus Christ had promised to empower the assembly. It typifies the present dispensation of the Spirit, which is marked by two facts: (1) Christ is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, sitting on the Father's throne. (2) The Holy Spirit came not only to empower the assembly founded by the Lord Jesus Himself during His personal ministry but also to indwell the assembly as her Illuminator, Comforter, and Guide. As the feast of weeks included the harvest—"ye," the corners of the field—"the poor," and the gleanings of the harvest—"the stranger," the fulfillment of Pentecost included Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), and Gentiles (Acts 10).

Baptism in the Spirit was not designed to be regeneration. Therefore, the phenomenon of baptism in the Spirit cannot be equated with the new birth. This phenomenon was not one thing at Pentecost and something entirely different subsequent to Pentecost. Since the Holy Spirit empowered the assembly that had already been formed, He did not give her life at Pentecost. Baptism in the Spirit is a historical event. As there was only one Calvary where Jesus Christ completed His redemptive work, there was only one baptism in the Holy Spirit when Christ baptized His body in the Holy Spirit. Christ's death will never be repeated, and baptism of the assembly in the Spirit will never be repeated.

Let us consider each of the seven verses referring to baptism in the Spirit:



MATTHEW 3:11—"I am now baptizing you in [*en*, locative of sphere] water because of [*eis*, accusative of cause] your repentance, and the One coming after me is stronger than I, of whom I am not worthy to be carrying His sandals; He shall baptize [future active indicative of *baptidzo*] you in [*en*, locative of sphere] the Holy Spirit and fire" (translation). As John was the Agent in water baptism, Christ was the Agent in Spirit baptism. John would not baptize anyone in water until he had manifested genuine repentance (Matt. 3:8). John's baptism because of repentance was not "with" water but "in" water (*en hudati*). The preposition *en* does not mean "with" because water was not the instrument by which John baptized, but it was the sphere into which he baptized. Those who believe and teach covenant theology translate "in" as "with," but those who deny both covenant theology and pedobaptism translate it "in."

MARK 1:8—"I baptized you in water; but He shall baptize [future active indicative of *baptidzo*] you in the Holy Spirit" (translation). Since the preposition *en* is not used in this verse, the locative case of *hudati*—water—alone determines the preposition that should be used. It is the same case as that used in Matthew 3:11.

LUKE 3:16—"John answered, saying to all, I indeed baptize you in [*en*, locative of sphere] water; but One stronger than I is coming, of whom I am not worthy to untie His sandals; He shall baptize [future active indicative of *baptidzo*] you in [*en*, locative of sphere] the Holy Spirit and fire" (translation). The Greek text in Luke 3:16 is the same as that of Matthew 3:11.

JOHN 1:33—"And I had not known Him; but the One having sent me to baptize in water, that One said to me, on whomever you may see the Spirit coming down and remaining on Him, this is the One baptizing [futuristic present

participle of *baptidzo*] in [*en*, locative of sphere] the Holy Spirit” (translation). One of the unique characteristics of John’s Gospel from the synoptic gospels is that he described in retrospect what John the Baptist had witnessed earlier. But he used the futuristic present tense of *baptidzo* to describe what Christ would do at Pentecost. John used this participle of *baptidzo* with the locative case “in the Holy Spirit [*en pneumati hagio*].” The futuristic present is logical in view of the conclusive evidence of the eternal Son who, on seven occasions recorded in John, declared, “I AM” (John 6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:11; 11:25; 14:3; 15:1).

ACTS 1:5—“For John indeed baptized [aorist active indicative of *baptidzo*] in water; but you shall be baptized in [*en*, locative of sphere] the Holy Spirit not many days after these” (translation). In addition to his Gospel, Luke was the author of the book of Acts: “The first account I produced, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to be doing and to be teaching, until the day on which He was taken up, having given orders by the agency of the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He selected. To whom also He presented Himself as the One who lives after suffering by means of infallible proofs, being seen by them through forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to be waiting for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me; for John indeed baptized in water; but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days after these” (Acts 1:1-5—translation).

Observe that Luke concluded his Gospel the same way he began Acts: “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of my Father on you; but you stay in the city of Jerusalem until you may be clothed with power from above” (Luke 24:49—translation). In the reference in Acts, Luke quoted what John had done and Christ’s promise of baptizing in the Holy Spirit,

which all four of the evangelists recorded. In relation to John's baptizing, the verb *baptidzo* is aorist active indicative; it is history. On the other hand in relation to Christ's baptizing, it is future passive indicative. The passive voice signifies that Christ baptized them; they had no part in it any more than we had any part in our regeneration. The references that speak of our being born of God are always in the passive voice. Christ would baptize the infant assembly at Pentecost. The subjects would be acted on rather than their participating in the action. The indicative mood is the mood of reality; therefore, the promise of the Father was unconditional (Acts 1:4). As Pass-over, which is Calvary, was for all who were elected to salvation, Pentecost was for all who would constitute the body of Jesus Christ. The promise of Pentecost was unconditional and inclusive of everyone who would make up the body of Christ. It was in the passive voice, the indicative mood, and future tense. "It shall be accomplished not many days after these."

Some base their objection to the unconditional promise of Pentecost on Acts 1:4—"And being assembled together with them, He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to be waiting for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me" (translation). Calvary was not dependent on the elect doing anything. We did not exist then, and yet we were crucified with Christ. Was Pentecost different in this respect? We were baptized in the sphere of the Spirit at Pentecost without being present, as we were crucified with Christ without being present. The belief of one demands the belief of the other, and the denial of one demands the denial of the other. The first five verses of Acts 1 form the introduction that connects Luke's Gospel with Acts. Therefore, the reality of Pentecost was not dependent on the disciples' obedience to God's command any more than Christ's second advent is dependent on our obedience to Him. As the saved look for the second advent of Christ, the disciples waited for Pentecost.

ACTS 11:16—“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized [future passive indicative of *baptidzo*] in [*en*, locative of sphere] the Holy Spirit” (translation). This statement was made by Peter after the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), and the Gentiles (Acts 10) had been baptized in the Holy Spirit to complete Pentecost. This verse is a quotation of Acts 1:5. It is historical because the Holy Spirit had come on the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. In the interval between the five prophetic references and the two historical references, the Holy Spirit had come. The infant assembly had been baptized by the Lord Jesus Himself in the sphere of the Holy Spirit.

I CORINTHIANS 12:13—“For indeed [*kai*, used as an adverb here to mean even or indeed] in [*en*, locative of sphere] one Spirit we all were baptized [aorist passive indicative of *baptidzo*] into [*eis*, accusative of purpose] one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, and we all were made to drink [aorist passive indicative of *potidzo*, to be endued or permeated with] one Spirit” (translation). There are two major views of this text: (1) the Holy Spirit is the Agent, and (2) Christ is the Agent. Since neither the name of Christ nor the Holy Spirit is found in the verse, the true view is found in the preposition *en* in the light of the context and the overall context. The statement, “in one Spirit [*en heni pneumati*],” like the other six references we have considered, is in the locative of sphere. The verb for baptize is in the aorist tense; therefore, it is point action in past time. The passive voice means that the subjects were the recipients of the action. It is in the indicative mood, the mood of reality.

The Bible student must now determine whether the aorist tense of the verb “baptized” points to Pentecost or to the new birth. Some say it points to being baptized in the Holy Spirit subsequent to the new birth. The past tense can be one minute,

one hour, one day, one month, or several years. Both regeneration and Pentecost are past tense. Scriptural evidence has already been given to show that out of the seven references to Pentecost five are prophetic and two are historical. This verse is one of the historical references. Since Christ is the baptizer in the first six references to being baptized in the Spirit, there is no justification for saying that in this instance the Holy Spirit is the Agent. The Holy Spirit does not baptize one into Himself any more than Jesus Christ baptized one into Himself. All who Jesus Christ baptized in the Holy Spirit were already in Him either by regeneration or in a covenant relationship. Christ is not the baptizer of individuals into Himself, but He was the baptizer of all who constituted the assembly into one body at Pentecost.

Our baptism in the sphere of the Spirit at Pentecost was in the same sense as our fall in Adam. We did not fall in Adam when we were born. Our fall in Adam took place six thousand years ago. Our solidarity with Adam in his fall must be considered. He was our representative: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Hence, we all sinned when Adam sinned by virtue of our solidarity with him and his representative headship.

Our baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost was in the same sense that the elect were crucified with Christ at Calvary. We were not crucified with Christ when we were regenerated but when Jesus Christ was crucified: "I have been crucified [*sun-estauromai*, perfect passive indicative of *sustauroo*] with Christ..." (Gal. 2:20—translation). The first part of the compound form of the verb is *sun*, which means "with," and the stem means "crucified." The perfect tense of this verb denotes completed action in past time with a resulting state of being. The perfect tense can be used four ways: (1) A perfect tense verb can be used in what is known as the intensive sense,

emphasizing the resultant state of being rather than point action in the past. The frequently occurring statement “it is written” illustrates this truth. In every instance in the New Testament where that expression is found, it is a perfect passive indicative. Therefore, it should be translated “it stands written.” What God has written is permanently written. The emphasis is on the resulting state of being. Another illustration concerns the resurrection of Christ. He has been raised. The emphasis is not on the act of His resurrection but on the fact that He is raised; He lives. (2) Another way in which the perfect verb is used is called the consummative sense. This emphasis is on completed action, that is, the whole thing. The two perfect tense verbs in II Timothy 4:7 illustrate the consummative sense of a perfect verb. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course.” Both verbs call attention to Paul’s whole struggle. He not only had begun a good fight, but he also had finished his course. (3) The perfect tense of a verb can also be used in the iterative sense. The iterative refers to action going on but not constantly until the action is completed. This is illustrated in I John 1:1—“THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen....” Both “we have heard” and “we have seen” are perfect active indicative verbs, but they do not indicate continuous hearing and seeing. They heard the Lord; then they did not hear Him; then they heard Him more. The action was broken while it was going on. (4) The perfect tense of a verb may be used in the dramatic sense. The dramatic brings the past event vividly into the present; hence, it is complete action in past time understood in present time. This use is illustrated in the Lord’s parable of the one who found a pearl of great price and sold all he had in order to buy it (Matt. 13:46). The word “sold” is a perfect active indicative verb. It emphasizes great loss in the completed sale of all things which was realized in the present time.

After looking at the four ways perfect tense verbs are used,

let us determine the use of the verb for our having been crucified with Christ in Galatians 2:20. It is used intensively, completed action in past time with a resulting state of being. The results and not the action continues. Paul used the same word, but in the first aorist passive indicative form in Romans 6:6—“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him [Christ]” (translation). Both verses are to be understood legally rather than literally.

The verb “baptized” of I Corinthians 12:13 has been interpreted many ways. The following five will cover every religious view of any so-called prominence:

1. The first view is that baptism in the Spirit and baptism in water are sacramentally connected. Those who hold this view say the sacrament of baptism initiates one into the Christian faith and assembly. Since it is not what we do for Christ but what He does for us, they emphasize the passive voice of the verbs “baptized” and “drink.” They explain that the moment baptism becomes for us what it is, its mode ceases to dominate our thinking, even in symbol; hence, a few drops as well as an ocean of water can symbolize.

2. The second view is that baptism in the Spirit was literal baptism into the assembly, the one body at Corinth. Those who hold this view believe the Corinthians’ being baptized refers to a definite past when they put on the outward badge, the symbol of the inward change wrought in them by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:2 ff). They define the meaning of being made to drink in one Spirit as a definite act in the past which was probably their inward experience of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the act of baptism.

3. A third view is that the Spirit of I Corinthians 12:13 is the Agent of baptism; hence, the Holy Spirit since the original bestowment and personal residence in the assembly at Pente-

cost baptizes every believing sinner into the one body the moment he is saved, never subsequent to the exercise of saving faith. Those who hold this view comment that the latter half of the text supplements the first by emphasizing that at the same time the Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the one body, He places them in the sphere of the position of fullness; thus, every believer is baptized in the Spirit at the moment of salvation.

4. A fourth view is that the Spirit has baptized every believer into Christ, but Christ has not baptized every believer into the Spirit. Those holding this view state that the Holy Spirit is the Agent in regeneration, Jesus Christ is the Agent in baptism in the Spirit subsequent to regeneration, and the evidence of the second baptism is speaking in tongues.

5. The fifth view is that any communication of the Spirit is called a baptism. Those with this view describe the Holy Spirit as being poured out; and those on whom He is poured, whether in regeneration, sanctifying, or influencing, are baptized. Their conclusion is that no person is immersed in either water or Spirit.

There is nothing in the context of I Corinthians 12:13 to suggest that Paul was talking about sacraments, water baptism, or regeneration. The whole body of Christ was baptized in the Spirit at Pentecost in the same sense that the body was crucified with Christ at Calvary. The “all” who were baptized in the Spirit were made to drink. In both instances, the “all” were acted on rather than participating in the action. Conclusively, the “all” who were baptized into one body are the same “all” who were made to drink in one Spirit. The same aphoristic statement concerning all who were baptized were the same all who were made to drink is seen in Romans 8:29-30. There are five aorist active indicative verbs—foreordained, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified—in those two



verses, called the five great golden links of Biblical doctrine. How wonderful to be assured that the foreordained equal the called, and the called equal the glorified in number. These verses refute the idea of a person being foreordained, effectually called, and then sinning so as to lose his salvation. If saved persons could lose their salvation, God would have foreordained some who were called and justified, but they died in their sins and would never be glorified. Such teaching reflects against the character and work of God (Phil. 1:6).

Before regeneration, those elected by God in grace are members of the baptized body of Jesus Christ in the same sense that He said, “And I have other sheep, which are not from this sheepfold; it is necessary for Me to bring those also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock [with] one Shepherd” (John 10:16—translation). He already had them by covenant relationship, but they had not yet been saved. Every child of God today is part of those sheep that He had when He spoke these words. The atonement from God’s perspective cannot be dated (Rev. 13:8). Christ’s assembly at Pentecost included sheep other than those who were baptized at that time. All who constituted the assembly at Pentecost were Christ’s by the Father’s gift to Him (John 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24) and by His own death for them (John 10:11, 15). He died for the sheep; thus, the whole body was legally and redemptively Christ’s at Pentecost, even though He must bring (aorist active infinitive of *ago*, which signifies to bring into the body) other sheep (John 10:16). As the other sheep are actually brought by regeneration into the body, they are made to drink in one Spirit, “the Spirit of truth” (John 15:26).

Paul had the care (*merimna*, care, concern, or anxious interest) of all the assemblies (II Cor. 11:28). Therefore, what he wrote to the Corinthians could not be restricted to them. The apostle used the human body as an illustration of unity in diversity and diversity in unity: “For even as the body is

one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ” (I Cor. 12:12—translation). Unity in diversity is the law of the body of Christ. Paul followed his illustration of the human body with the statement, “For indeed in one Spirit we all were baptized into one body...” (v. 13—translation).

In I Corinthians 12:13, there are certain words that must be understood:

1. The preposition *en* is in the locative case. The locative case can be used either in the sense of place, time, or sphere. Here it is the sphere of the Spirit. If it were the instrumental of agency, it would indicate that the Holy Spirit was the baptizer. However, Jesus Christ is the baptizer, and the Holy Spirit is the sphere of power into which the body was baptized at Pentecost. He began His assembly before Pentecost, and He is continuing to build His assembly.

2. The adjective *heni* is the locative neuter singular of *heis*, meaning one. It is a cardinal (of fundamental importance) adjective describing the one true Spirit. Hence, we see why we are admonished by John: “BELOVED, do not believe every spirit, but test [present active imperative of *dokimadzo*, examine, test, or prove] the spirits whether they are from God...” (I John 4:1—translation). The Spirit that is of God makes both teacher and the persons taught ready to prove what is truth and approve that truth by practical fruitfulness.

3. The preposition *eis* is the accusative of purpose, and it agrees with the one body into which we all were baptized.

4. The cardinal adjective *hen* is in the accusative case, neuter singular of *heis*, meaning one. It describes the one body of fundamental importance into which all who make up the body of Christ were baptized at Pentecost. It is also used to

speak of the one Spirit which the body, made up of Jews and Gentiles, was made to drink (I Cor. 10:32; Eph. 2:11-22).

5. The verbs “baptized” and “made to drink” are both aorist passive indicative. They speak of what Jesus Christ had done for them in past time.

Subsequent to Christ’s ascension, the eleven apostles with the women, Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ’s brothers were continuing with one mind to pray in the upper room. They were all waiting for the fulfillment of the promise that the Father had made that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Before Pentecost, the disciples waited for the promise of the Father; after Pentecost, believers are never admonished to wait for the Spirit. The disciples, being born of the Spirit, were baptized by Christ in the sphere of the Spirit thus giving new power to the assembly for the fulfillment of her commission. That is the fulfillment of Acts 1:4-8. There is a difference between being filled with the Spirit and being baptized in the sphere of the Spirit. The command to be filled with (*en* instrumental of association) in Ephesians 5:18 is a command to be continually controlled by the Spirit in whose sphere one lives by association. This continual control comes by studying the word, learning, growing, and applying Biblical principles.

The assembly at Pentecost represented the entire body of Jesus Christ, although countless millions were to be added during the dispensation of the assembly of Christ. The experience at Pentecost was collective. It is never represented as an experience on individuals. We are not baptized in the Spirit when we are regenerated, but we are born of the Spirit (John 3:8). When one is born of the Spirit, he is introduced at that time into the already baptized body of Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 12:13 does not state, “by one Spirit is each one baptized.” Neither does it say that “each one is baptized into the

body,” but “all were baptized into the body.” Those who believe that if the assembly existed before Pentecost, it would have died when Christ died fail to understand Christ’s death. The apostles, who were the first to be set in the assembly, and other believers died neither physically nor spiritually when Jesus Christ died to pay for their sins, which had been legally forgiven. They were very much alive during and subsequent to Christ’s death.

# 6

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## ASSEMBLY BEING BUILT ON THE LIVING STONE

Jesus Christ is the Living Stone (*petra*). He alone can fit the description of Isaiah's prophecy: "...Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed" (Is. 28:16 NASB). The Psalmist said, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (Ps. 118:22). Jesus Christ applied the symbol of "the stone" to Himself: "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Matt. 21:42). Both Paul and Peter quoted Isaiah 28:16 in their inspired writings (Rom. 9:33; I Pet. 2:6).

Apart from "the Living Stone," the Bible would be meaningless; the elect, hopeless; and heaven, a vain dream. What is life without Christ? It is like winter, with all its barrenness and death, without spring. Life without Christ leaves one without hope of resurrection life. It is like studying history and leaving out Jesus Christ. The past, present, and future, as far as time is concerned, center in Jesus Christ.

God is the ever present “I Am.” Hence, the “stone” was eternally laid: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting...” (Ps. 90:2). That which was eternally decreed was made known by Divine revelation. The stone that was eternally prepared and prophetically revealed was actually laid in the sufferings and death of the incarnate Son of God (I Pet. 1:18-21).

Peter spoke of Jesus Christ as “a living stone” (I Pet. 2:4). Thus, he passed from the metaphor to the reality. God’s being represented by the metaphor of a “rock” was not something new to either Isaiah or the New Testament apostles. A metaphor is the application of a word to an object it does not literally denote, such as “a mighty fortress is our God.” Moses used the metaphor “rock” when he spoke of God in Deuteronomy 32:4—“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” In the Old Testament, Christ is called the Rock, the Mighty God: “UNTO thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit” (Ps. 28:1). “Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me” (Ps. 31:2, 3). “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps. 61:2).

There is no contradiction between Paul’s declaration concerning the foundation which he “had laid” (aorist active indicative of *tithemi*, I Cor. 3:10) and the foundation “being laid” (present middle participle of *keimai*, I Cor. 3:11), who is Jesus Christ. No foundation laid by the apostle Paul could take precedence over the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the subjective experience of embracing the testimony of God

proclaimed by Paul would be invalid apart from the objective Savior, His Person and Work (I Cor. 2:1-5). Hence, the cause takes priority over the effect.

Some believe that Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:20, concerning "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone," is focusing on Christ in both the New and Old Testaments; thus apostolical and prophetical teachings center in the chief "cornerstone" (*akrogoniaios*—from *akros*, highest, extreme, or the topmost point; and *gonia*, the head of the corner or cornerstone—used in Ephesians 2:20 and I Peter 2:6). There is no denial that Jesus Christ is the focal point of all Scripture; but to say the prophets represent the prophetical—Old Testament—Scriptures and the apostles represent the historical—New Testament—Scriptures is going beyond the context of Ephesians 2:20. The order of the appearance of the words "apostles and prophets" in Ephesians 3:5 and 4:11 indicates that both are New Testament servants who make a contribution to the secondary foundation laid in the proclamation of the message. Many lose sight of the fact that the prophet is one who tells forth the message as well as foretells the future. The prophet is foremost a proclaimer and interpreter of Divine revelation, but this does not indicate that his interpretation of the revelation does not include foretelling. The point that must be understood is that with a completed revelation (Jude 3), God is not giving additional Scriptures today by visions and revelations. In that sense, we have no prophets because there is no need for them. A completed revelation needs only interpreting and proclaiming.

The prophets worked hand in glove with the apostles. Apostles were men of special qualifications. In order to qualify as an apostle, one must have either companied with Christ during His public ministry (Acts 1:21) or supernaturally seen (*heoraka*, perfect active indicative of *horao*, which

means has become visible or appeared) Him (I Cor. 9:1; 15:8). These specially privileged, extraordinary servants were foundation builders in the sense that they proclaimed the message by Divine revelation. Their having seen Christ personally is the reason they are the first mentioned in Ephesians (2:20; 3:5; 4:11). Having companied with Christ or having supernaturally seen Him was not one of the qualifications for the prophets. The proper beginning for the local aspect of the *ekklesia* was important. As the foundation work began, it was confirmed by the Lord working through the apostles and prophets to confirm the objective message with accompanying signs. Confirmation was necessary then because the New Testament was not at that time committed to writing: “For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:2-4). There should be no problem distinguishing between Jesus Christ being the actual foundation of the assembly and the foundation of the apostles and prophets consisting of the proclamation of the objective revelation of Jesus Christ, the one and only foundation that is “being laid.”

Peter and Paul combine to give us the great truths concerning Jesus Christ, the foundation of the elect, and the elect constituting Christ’s portion—the dwelling place of God (I Pet. 2:4-6; Eph. 2:19-22). The Lord’s portion is His people (Deut. 32:9). Jesus Christ is the portion of every believer because the believer is Christ’s portion. The word portion is sometimes understood as a piece or part of a thing. Jesus Christ, however, is the Rock that cannot be divided among the saints. All of Christ, the Rock, is each believer’s portion, because the Father has given Christ wholly and entirely to



each person saved by His grace. Therefore, every Christian can say, “Christ is mine.” He is all the child of God needs because He is eternal, infinite, all-sufficient, and satisfying. The Lord Jesus is the believer’s light in darkness, peace in turmoil, abundance in want, and life in death.

As the foundation is the first portion of a building, the crucified Christ is the primary foundation of the assembly that is being continually built. In addition to the foundation that was actually laid in the substitutionary death of the Savior, a secondary foundation was laid by the teaching of the apostles and prophets. Their message was the objective revelation concerning the foundation which no man can lay. Men are always trying to lay another foundation. Scripture gives many warnings against false teachers and antichrists (Gal. 1:6-9; II Pet. 2:1; I John 2:18-23). Christ, the true foundation, can never be replaced or have another in opposition to Him because He is God manifested in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). Therefore, He is the foundation of redemption, regeneration, faith, Christian living, hope, resurrection, and the kingdom. Paul made it clear in I Corinthians 3:11 that no one is able to lay another (*allon*, accusative singular of *allos*, an adjective which means another of the same kind) beside (*para*, accusative of opposition, which means in opposition to) the one being laid (*keimenon*, present middle participle of *keimai*, treated as a deponent verb), who is Jesus Christ. Persons who think they can lay a foundation in opposition to the one true foundation “being laid” demonstrate by their arrogance that they are antichrists. The final manifestation of such arrogance will be in the antichrist himself (II Thess. 2:3, 4).

How could the foundation continue being laid when Jesus Christ had already died? Jesus Christ constitutes the primary foundation of which Paul spoke in I Corinthians 3:11. The apostles and prophets were a secondary foundation in the sense that they proclaimed the message concerning Jesus

Christ, the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). The apostle Paul stated in I Corinthians 2:1-5 the foundation he was laying: “And I also, having come to you, came not with high sounding words or of wisdom, preaching to you the testimony of God. For I decided not to have known anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One who has been crucified [perfect passive participle of *stauroo*]. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching was not with persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, in order that your faith may not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (translation). Hence, the secondary foundation was in the message of Christ preached by the apostles and prophets. Each time one of God’s ministers preaches Jesus Christ, from his perspective, he is laying the foundation.

Ministers today cannot lay the foundation in the same sense as the apostles and prophets. They were by inspiration laying the foundation of a completed objective message concerning Jesus Christ, the primary foundation. When the objective message of God had been completed by the apostles and prophets, it was finished. The sense in which we lay the foundation is by elementary teaching or instruction (Heb. 6:1). Instead of speaking by inspiration in giving the objective message of God, we speak from inspiration in giving God’s message which is already completed. The person who denies Christ has no message. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself began at Moses and all the prophets expounding in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. The one true foundation of Jesus Christ that is being laid agrees with the assembly that Jesus Christ is progressively building.

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## A STONE IN THE ASSEMBLY

There are many divergent opinions about Christ's statement "...you are Peter [*Petros*, masculine], and upon this rock [*petra*, feminine] I shall continue to build my assembly (feminine)" (Matt. 16:18—translation). The following list is a summary of those opinions: (1) The Roman Catholic view is that Christ made Peter the visible head of His assembly when He said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock [they say "this rock" is Peter] I shall continue to build my assembly." They say Peter as the visible head of Christ's assembly was the first in a succession of popes. (2) The view commonly held by most noncatholics is that the rock (*petra*) is Peter's confession. (3) The Scriptural view is that the rock (*petra*) is Jesus Christ.

No honest person denies the fallibility of the most highly trained minds. The most dedicated persons are influenced, to some degree, by the institutions where they received training. After making due allowance for the influence of education, the stubbornness of prejudice, and the inclination to error, Christians continue to have the sufficiency of God to guide

them: “Not that we are sufficient [nominative masculine plural of the adjective *hikanos*, which means appropriate, competent, or able] of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency [nominative feminine singular of *hikanotes*, competence or fitness] is of God; Who also hath made us able [aorist active indicative of *hikanoo*, which means to make capable or sufficient] ministers of the new testament...” (II Cor. 3:5, 6).

Scriptural evidence condemns the affirmation that Peter was the first visible head of Christ’s assembly and that since then she is governed by a succession of popes. Peter was a man, but he was a mortal, sinful man (Acts 10:26; Matt. 26:74). Peter wavered before Pentecost (Matt. 16:22; John 18:10, 17, 25, 27; 21:21, 22). Subsequent to Pentecost, Peter did not act as head of Christ’s assembly (Acts 15). Furthermore, He was not recognized by the Jerusalem conference as being the head. Moreover, the time came when Paul opposed (*anthistemi*, to oppose, resist, or stand out against) Peter for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:9-14).

There is no Biblical proof that Peter’s so-called authority was transferred to a succession of popes. Scripture refutes the idea of apostles today. The qualifications for an apostle included accompanying the disciples during the time that Jesus Christ went in and out among them (Acts 1:21). This qualified Matthias to take Judas’ place. The second qualification was that one must have been an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, and Paul met that qualification. He said, “AM I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen [perfect active indicative of *horao*, which means have seen] Jesus Christ our Lord...” (I Cor. 9:1). Paul referred to this experience again in I Corinthians 15:8—“And last of all he was seen [aorist passive indicative of *horao*] of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

Had Peter been the first head of Christ’s assembly, each of

the Corinthians who said, “I am of Cephas,” would not have been condemned (I Cor. 1:12); and Paul would have been incorrect to admonish the assembly at Corinth. He would have had to condemn all the parties except those who said, “We are of Cephas,” the one Roman Catholics say is the visible head and Christ is the invisible head. The apostle Peter did not call people to himself but to Jesus Christ, the Head of the assembly which is His body.

### **Peter’s Alleged Roman Primacy Disproved**

The Church of Rome has declared Peter to be the rock on which the “church” is built. Furthermore, she claims there can be no salvation apart from the Pope, who Rome claims as Peter’s lineal descendant. Two questions are in order: (1) Did Christ mean Peter when He said, “Upon this rock I shall continue to build my assembly”? (2) What is the Biblical history of Peter?

The assembly which Jesus Christ “is continuing to build” is composed exclusively of living stones united to the Living Stone, the Son of the Living God. Although the Roman Catholic Church claims she can only interpret Scriptures according to “the unanimous consent of the Fathers,” according to history, there has not been that unanimous consent. Matthew 16:18 has been interpreted differently by some of the “Fathers”: (1) Origen and Jerome applied the verse to Peter personally. (2) Ambrose, Gregory, and Chrysostom applied it to Peter’s confession. (3) Augustine applied it to Christ Himself.

Did Peter become the Bishop of Antioch in 39 A.D.? Consideration of the following list will help to answer that question:

1. Three years after Paul was saved, Peter was residing in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:15-18).
2. After that, he was at Lydda (Acts 9:26-32).
3. Next, he was at Joppa (Acts 10).
4. Following that, he was at Caesarea (Acts 10).
5. Then, he was at Jerusalem (Acts 11:2). This proves that Peter would have had to be a traveling pope between 39 A.D. and 42 A.D.
6. And then, he was imprisoned at Jerusalem (Acts 12). What about Peter's alleged Bishopric of Rome beginning in 42 A.D.?
7. Shortly after Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12), he was at the conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15).
8. Soon thereafter he was at Antioch, where Paul withstood him to his face (Gal. 2).
9. Peter could not have begun his episcopate at Rome, because Paul could not build on another man's foundation (Rom. 15:20).
10. Paul saluted 24 persons by name in Romans 16, but Peter was not named.
11. In Acts 28, there is no reference to Peter among the brethren received by Paul on his arrival at Rome. There is no record of Peter's ever being in Rome.
12. Paul did not mention Peter when he was imprisoned the second time in Rome. He said, "Only Luke is with me"

(II Tim. 4:11). Furthermore, all men forsook him (II Tim. 4:16). Would “Pope Peter” forsake the apostle Paul?

Subsequent to Christ’s promising to give the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, He enabled three of the apostles to experience a foretaste of the coming kingdom—to which the keys apply (Matt. 16:28-17:13). Following this experience, the disciples asked the question, “Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens?” (Matt. 18:1—translation). The Greek word for “greater” is *megas*, which speaks of men in high positions, rank or dignity of men who stand in relation to God, or more prominent or outstanding men because of certain advantages. Christ answered the disciples’ question by showing that “greatness” is not the world’s view of greatness. Men of the world regard greatness according to one’s social, intellectual, or financial status. Conversely, God’s view of greatness is represented by the humble submission and dependent simplicity of a little child. Hence, true greatness characterizes one who is not overcome by the world’s standard but by the honor or recognition he receives from the Lord by grace. Furthermore, he is concerned about how much he can suffer by being submissive to and dependent on God. Would such a question, “Who is greater?” have ever been asked if Peter had been appointed by Christ as the visible head of the assembly?

The assembly that Jesus Christ is continuing to build has only one foundation. Christ did not say, “On the succession of popes, I will continue to build my assembly.” He said, “Upon this [singular] rock [singular] I shall continue to build [progressive future active indicative of *oikodomeo*] my assembly [*ekklesia*]” (Matt. 16:18—translation). Thus, there is but one rock or foundation for Christ’s assembly. Her foundation does not change from one pope to another. Unlike the succession of priests in the Aaronic priesthood in Israel, Christ has no successors in the assembly.

Those who believe the word *petra* refers to Peter rely on the demonstrative adjective “this” (*taute*) (Matt. 16:18), and say it refers to *petra*, its nearest antecedent. They also believe that Peter’s relation to the early assembly proves he was a foundation stone. They are convinced that Christ is represented in Matthew 16:18 as the architect and builder, not as the foundation.

Contradictory to what some say about “upon this rock [*petra*]” referring to Peter, *petra* is feminine gender and Peter (*petros*) is masculine. Since *ekklesia* (assembly) is feminine, it agrees with *petra* but not with *Petros* (Peter). A mere reference to the apostles constituting the foundation of the assembly in Ephesians 2:20 is insufficient. The Greek word for foundation in both I Corinthians 3:10-11 and Ephesians 2:20 is *themelios*, which has the basic meaning of a foundation. Metaphorically, this noun refers to a foundation laid by elementary instruction (Heb. 6:1), the foundation of a superstructure of faith, doctrine, or hope (I Cor. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:20), a foundation laid by preaching the gospel (Rom. 15:20), the apostles and prophets constituting a foundation for the assembly (Eph. 2:20), and the apostles’ names appearing on the twelve foundations of the walls of the holy city, new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

No one can question that the word *petra* is used as a metaphor to suggest a comparison with someone or something. Peter (*Petros*) is used as a proper name, but *petra* is used only in the sense of a rock distinguished from a small stone or rock. Paul used the word when speaking of the blessings Israel experienced in the wilderness. They “...did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10:4). Peter used the word “rock” (*lithos*) when speaking of Christ or of the constituent parts of the spiritual temple, the body of Christ (I Pet. 2:4-8). This is a Divine



commentary on Matthew 16:18— “...I shall continue to build my assembly...” (translation).

According to Ephesians 2:19-20 and I Corinthians 3:10-12, the foundation of the *ekklesia* is twofold: (1) The actual foundation is union with Jesus Christ, the Living Stone. Apart from Him, there is no spiritual life. (2) The doctrinal foundation is the teaching concerning Jesus Christ. The message of Christ, the Living Rock, can be feminine (“upon this rock,” locative of place, feminine singular of *petra*—Matt. 16:18), masculine (“declaring,” present active participle nominative masculine singular of *kataggello*, which means to announce or proclaim—I Cor. 2:1), or neuter (“testimony,” accusative neuter singular of *marturion*, which means testimony or evidence—I Cor. 2:1; and “proclamation,” nominative neuter singular of *kerugma*, which means preaching, proclaiming, or proclamation—I Cor. 2:4). This was the truth affirmed by Paul: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (I Cor. 3:10).

The following are conclusions reached as a result of the author’s personal interest in and research of the feminine gender of “rock” (*petra*) concerning “upon this rock” of Matthew 16:18— (1) The Greek noun *petra* is found 15 times in the New Testament (Matt. 7:24, 25; 16:18; 27:51, 60; Mark 15:46; Luke 6:48; 8:6, 13; Rom. 9:33; I Cor. 10:4—twice; I Pet. 2:8; Rev. 6:15, 16). (2) It is always a feminine noun regardless of how it is used. (3) It is used not only to describe a rock, but it is also used metaphorically. (4) Another Greek noun, *lithos* (stone), is used 54 times. This noun is always used in the masculine gender. (5) When Paul quoted Isaiah 28:16, he used *petra* to describe the prophetic Rock, and Peter used *lithos* to describe the same prophetic passage. (6) The message concerning the Rock, Jesus Christ, can be either

masculine, feminine, or neuter; therefore, each of the genders speaks of the objective revelation of the Rock, Jesus Christ.

### **Peter Sifted By Satan**

Christ purposed that Satan sift Peter; and through that sifting, the Lord Jesus strengthened him. Subsequent to Peter's sifting and strengthening, he was sent forth to strengthen the brothers. Both of His Epistles are instructive to brothers in Christ in order that they might be strengthened. Prior to Peter's sifting, an argument arose among the disciples concerning who among them was esteemed greater (Luke 22:24). Jesus Christ told the disciples that greatness is not in ruling over others but in serving them: "And He said to them, The kings of the nations have power over them; and the ones having authority over them are being called benefactors. But it is not like this with you; on the contrary, the greater among you, let him become the younger; and the one ruling, as the one serving. For who is greater, the one being a dinner guest, or the one serving? Not the one being the dinner guest? But I am among you as the one serving. And you are the ones who have continued with Me in my testings; and I am assigning to you a kingdom, as My Father assigned to Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:25-30—translation). The Lord then turned to Peter to inform him of Satan's desire to test him: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked [aorist middle indicative of *exaiteomai*] for you [plural], to sift like the wheat" (v. 31—translation).

The Gospels record much about Peter. He was hasty, headlong, spoke presumptuously and unadvisedly, and waded in water too deep for him; but he always turned like a little child to his Master and Lord. Christ spoke more often to him than to any of His other disciples. His speaking was sometimes in

blame and sometimes in praise. Next to Judas, Christ spoke more severe words to Peter than to the others. This apostle was full of inconsistencies. He was the first to confess Christ, and the first to deny Him. He was the first to reach the tomb, and the first to suggest returning to his former occupation. He was correct in his attitude concerning the Person of Christ but incorrect in his concept of Christ's work.

Peter's inconsistencies and his need for sifting are manifested in some of his statements: (1) "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). (2) "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22). (3) "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27). (4) "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matt. 17:4). (5) "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). (6) "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13:8). (7) "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14).

Peter's character was revealed in Christ's use of the names Simon and Peter (Luke 22:31, 34). The title "Simon" reminded him of his weakness in the flesh, and the title "Peter" reminded him of what he was by Divine grace. The secret of Peter's life is found in his first meeting with Jesus Christ. The Lord said to him, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42—translation). "Simon" signifies the natural man, but "Peter" signifies his becoming a living stone united to Jesus Christ, the massive living Rock. Without indicating a change in Peter's character, there would have been no purpose in using both names. He was changed by the grace of God from a natural, fleshly man to a man born of the Spirit. Although he retained within him the sin principle, as a Christian, he had the principle of life which nonchristians do not have. There

is a great contrast between flesh in the regenerate and flesh in the unregenerate. The flesh in Peter was flesh in its finest form. Whereas flesh in Judas was flesh in its most evil form because he was unregenerate. Peter manifested flesh in its finest form in self-confidence by assuming he was able and willing to die for the Lord Jesus Christ. Judas manifested flesh in its evil form by his conniving evil. All his thoughts were directed toward betraying the Lord Jesus Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

Satan's desire to sift Peter was prompted by Christ's purpose. The Greek word for *exetesato*, translated "hath desired" in the King James Bible, is an aorist middle indicative of *exaiteomai*, indicating that Satan asked for himself. The pronoun "you" in Luke 22:31 is plural, signifying that testing is for every Christian. The same thing that happened to Peter occurs in the life of every Christian. All Christians are tested for our good; but most of all, we are tested for God's glory. Sifting describes the effect of trials on a child of God. It brings out his infirmities for the purpose of strengthening him spiritually. Before wheat is ready for use in the kitchen, it must go through a process of having the chaff removed. Likewise, a Christian must have the chaff removed before he is useful in the service of the Lord.

God purposed that Satan sift Peter since too much of Simon was being manifested. To say Christ could not keep Satan from attacking Peter would be a denial of God's sovereignty. Distinction must be made between what God in His sovereignty can and cannot do and what He allows in order to fulfill His purpose.

Satan had observed Peter's inconsistencies. We are reminded of a parallel with Job, a righteous man who feared God and hated evil, who the Lord purposed Satan should test because of his weaknesses. Satan is intelligent enough to

discern more of our weaknesses than we are aware of, and he attacks us at our weakest point. This necessitates a study of the whole counsel of God, putting on the whole armor of God, and being equipped with Biblical knowledge in order that we might stand against all the attacks Satan launches against us. In view of Peter's inconsistencies, the Lord told him of His purpose that Satan sift him. He told him Satan had requested him for himself. The Devil's desire was to destroy Peter, but God placed a limitation on him.

Christ's desire by means of Satan's sifting was Peter's spiritual profit. As sifting of wheat does not destroy the kernel of life, Satan's sifting of a child of God cannot touch the God-given principle of faith. Although there was some chaff in Peter, it would be manifested that he was not all chaff. The Devil does not ask the Lord for the unsaved. They are already under his dominion as their god. He is the prince of the power of the air. Therefore, the unsaved person, a child of wrath, loves the world, the flesh, and all that goes with it (Eph. 2:1-3). If Peter had been wholly chaff, Satan would not have requested that the Lord allow him to sift Peter as wheat.

Peter's faith was preserved by Christ's intercessory prayer: "But I prayed for you [singular] in order that your faith may not cease [*me eklipe*, which can be translated 'may not suffer an eclipse']..." (Luke 22:32—translation). Although God grants Satan's request when it is for our spiritual benefit, we have the assurance that Christ is praying that our faith will never be completely eclipsed. In contrast to the plural pronoun in reference to our testing in verse 31, the singular pronoun is used in Christ's praying for Peter in verse 32. This gives us the certainty of Christ's praying for us individually. His intercessory prayer always precedes His giving Satan permission to test us and our actual testing. "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

The believer's strength lies in the intercession of Jesus Christ and not in his own feelings or resolutions. Christ prayed that the faith principle of life within Peter would never be totally eclipsed. Christ's intercession preserves faith. Here we learn the excellency of God-given faith. Satan hates the faith of God's elect. He has enough sense to know he cannot destroy it, because God's work is done correctly, and He will bring it to its conclusion.

When Peter was converted, he should then strengthen the brothers. The sifting process leads to another conversion experience. Christ did not pray that the sifting would not happen. But He did place a restriction on what Satan could and could not do. Satan cannot do more to us than Christ allows. Conversion does not refer to Peter's initial conversion experience. Other conversion experiences imply an original conversion experience in the life of a Christian. There are many conversion experiences throughout one's Christian life. Peter was to use the knowledge gained through the painful experience through which he must go in order to establish the brothers. Peter's two Epistles were written for that purpose.

The effect of Christ's warning to Peter was the excitement of his love. Although he was sincere, he was presumptuous and self-confident in his statement that he was prepared to go with Christ to prison and to death (Luke 22:33). His response was through a violent impulse that was not lasting. Violent impulse is not the same as a firm determination. A classic determination is demonstrated in Paul's declaration of his determination to fight a good fight of faith, keep the faith once declared to God's saints, and finish his course (II Tim. 4:6-8). Our decisions should be made on firm determinations based on our understanding of Biblical principles and not on violent impulses.

The effect of Christ's warning to Peter should be observed

by every Christian. If mere feeling could have made Peter a martyr, he was already prepared to be one. Feeling goes with response, but the understanding of Biblical principles must precede both. Many have a violent impulse to respond to appeals that are not based on Biblical principles. This is not repentance. Hasty decisions are frequently made in so-called revivals, but they are not enduring because they are not founded on Biblical truth. True revival comes from God.

Peter's self-confidence remained unshaken by the Lord's warning that "a cock shall not crow today, until you may deny to have known me three times" (Luke 22:34—translation). Christ's warning did not prevent Peter's fall. He did thrice deny the Lord before His enemies. Christians do fall but only into the arms of our Savior. We should take heed lest we fall, but nothing shall overtake us from which God has not already made a way for our escape (I Cor. 10:12, 13). A Christian falls, but those who only profess Christianity fall away. The flesh of every Christian will be exposed. Its untrustworthiness must be brought to light; and at the same time, the removal of the chaff causes the faith to be more evident. The more the chaff is separated, the more evident is one's faith, like the separation of husk from a life kernel.

Peter's restoration began with Christ. The Lord Jesus takes the initiative in our restoration. Nothing but active love for Jesus Christ will produce repentance and confession. When Christ looked on Peter, the disciple's heart was broken. He remembered the word of the Lord which had warned him of his denial, and he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61, 62). The incarnate Word was in his presence to remind him of His word. The disciples did not have the completed written word. How does Jesus Christ look on us today? He does not in Person look on us, but He looks on us as we read, study, and meditate on the written word of God. That look has the same effect as His personally looking on Peter. The word taught to

fallen believers will have the same effect today. Peter, unlike Judas, rose again. A Christian who has fallen will rise in the presence of the word of God when he hears the truth concerning his responsibility as a child of God. Peter was admonished to feed Christ's sheep, but his sifting and restoration were necessary before he could feed and strengthen others.



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## LIVING STONES IN THE ASSEMBLY

The nature of living stones is humility. The humble person is not necessarily one who bows and scrapes to everything and wants to get along with everybody in order to have peace at any price. He bows to the sovereign God by acknowledging that he is totally dependent on God and is willing to be taught. Humility was not present in the sons of Zebedee when they enlisted their mother's influence to make a request of the Lord Jesus. She approached Jesus Christ with her sons, kneeling and requesting that her sons sit on either side of Jesus Christ in His kingdom. The Lord answered her request by saying that she was ignorant of what she was asking. He then asked if the disciples were able to take a sip [aorist active infinitive of *pino*] of that cup which He was about to be drinking [present active infinitive of *pino*]. When the sons replied in the affirmative, Jesus Christ told them they would indeed suffer but not to the extent of His suffering. But to sit on His right or left was not His prerogative to give. Those places of honor will be given by the Father because He has prepared them (Matt. 20:20-23). Men of God may be objectively spiritual but subjectively carnal. It is easier to be industrious

and enthusiastic in public than in private. It is one thing to advance manfully to battle with the honor and glory of God as our object, but it is another to forget the contest and be unwilling to wait in suffering for the kingdom.

When the other disciples heard the request, they were angry concerning the two brothers. The Lord Jesus used the occasion to teach humility by reminding the disciples of the rulers of the nations lording it over them and the great ones having authority over them. But in contrast, it was not like that among the disciples. No Christian lords it over another Christian. The spirit of Christianity is servitude. The one who desires to become great shall be a servant to others, and the one who desires to be chief shall be a slave to others. The Lord then told the disciples that the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom in exchange for many (Matt. 20:24-28).

Unlike the Pharisees who loved places of honor, Christians should serve the Lord in humility. The more moral and religious a person is without grace, the more ignorant he is of God, and the more opposed he is to God's truth. The joy of the hypocrite is in himself. Pharisaism originates when obedience is not the outcome of the inner principle of grace. The further one is removed from the teaching of Scripture, the more hypocritical he becomes. The Lord condemned hypocrisy in Matthew 23:1-12. He spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, warning them not to act according to the Pharisees' works, inasmuch as they were saying but not performing. They were enlarging the case containing Scripture on the outside of their garments in order to be seen by men instead of hiding Scripture in their hearts. They loved the place of honor at the feast, the chief seats in the synagogues, greeting in the market places, and being addressed as Rabbi by men.

In contrast, children of God must not allow anyone to

address them as Rabbi: “But you do not be addressed Rabbi; for one is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not address anyone your father on earth; for one is your heavenly Father. Neither be addressed leaders; for one is your Leader, the Christ. And the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:8-12—translation). The prohibition was directed to the one being called Rabbi, not to the one calling him Rabbi. The word *rabbi* or teacher in our terminology would be doctor. Any man with a pastor’s heart will not permit anyone to call him doctor. Furthermore, he will not allow anyone to call him father. Christ was not referring to biological fathers or fathers in the sense of I Corinthians 4:15 or I Timothy 1:2. Paul used a term indicating mother in this same sense in Galatians 4:19. Neither was Christ condemning the use of the title father in reference to Abraham being the spiritual father of recipients of grace. He had reference to addressing a spiritual leader or instructor as father. Roman Catholics use the word pope, which in Latin means *papa*, to address their ministers. They also use the words Reverend, Holy Reverend, Holy Father, God’s Vicar on earth authorized by God to perform functions of Christ on earth, Sovereign Pontiff, His Excellency, Monsignor, His Reverence, His Holiness, etc.

The word reverend comes from the Hebrew word *yare*, which means to fear, to revere, or to reverence. Reverend has reference to the holy fear that God puts in the hearts of His people in order that they may not depart from Him (Jer. 32:40). The Hebrew word *yare* is used to refer to the emotion of fear, intellectual anticipation of evil apart from emotion, the fear children have for their parents, reverence for holy places, reverence for God, righteous behavior, and worship. The person who fears God in the sense of worship will implement his fear in practical righteousness. How can any man who claims to be a representative or minister of God

endure to be called “Reverend”? Another forbidden title is master or leader. The commonality of grace is indicated in the term brothers (Matt. 23:8). A minister is only a servant in Jesus Christ. He deserves no title of human exaltation.

### **Living Stones Taught Servitude**

In answer to Peter’s question to the Lord, “Behold, we left all things and followed you; what then shall there be for us?” (Matt. 19:27—translation), the Lord Jesus gave the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). The parable begins with the word “for” (*gar*), which points back to the reason for giving the parable. The Lord Jesus answered, “Truly I am saying to you, that the ones having followed me, in the new messianic age [*paliggenesia*, which means the new messianic age] when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, you shall also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28—translation). The Lord Jesus is presently sitting on the Father’s throne, not on the throne of His glory. But when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth, having received it from the Father, He will sit on His throne. Hence, He was speaking of the future kingdom when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, and the apostles shall also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The regeneration (v. 28) could not be the new birth, because Jesus Christ could not be born again. The word *paliggenesia*, a compound word made up of *palin*, an adverb meaning anew, again, further, or moreover, and *genesis*, which means source, origin, or birth, denotes a restoration to primeval condition of purity. It refers to the restoration of Israel in the kingdom. The Lord Jesus had already set Israel aside, but this brings in the Jews again. The religious Jews had turned the law which God had given into a means of salvation rather than their accepting

the decalogue for the purpose it was intended. Hence, Christ was showing they were merely religious people. There is no doubt that Jesus Christ was distinguishing religion from Christianity.

Jesus Christ gave a lesson on service to show that servitude in the assembly precedes the kingdom. The principles affirmed in this parable, which precedes the account of the request by the mother of the sons of Zebedee, are God's sovereignty, election, and grace. On the surface, the parable seems from the human point of view to show injustice. Is it not unusual for an employer to give as much remuneration to those who have worked one hour as to those who have worked nine or twelve hours? The act of the housemaster to the natural mind seems unjust, but the inequality was with the workers, not the housemaster. This can be understood only in the sense of the equalizing effect of grace. The motive of the laborers is of utmost importance. We learn from Peter's own mouth that his motive had been in his discipleship until now. Peter's mistake is recorded in order that we might be shown our own. Peter's mind was on his own interests, not on God. Here is a repetition of Matthew 16:23. When we think as men, we walk as men (I Cor. 3:1-3). Peter wanted his pay before he suffered.

The true motive for service is stated preceding the parable. The words "me" (Matt. 19:28) and "for my name's sake" (Matt. 19:29) determine that the motive for true surrender is affection for Jesus Christ Himself. The prediction that many who are first shall be last and many last shall be first in Matthew 19:30 and Matthew 20:16 introduced and concluded the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and forearmed the apostles against pride and self-congratulation.

We should observe the practical lesson in this parable; but at the same time, we must not overlook the lesson concerning the setting aside of Israel taught in the last major division of

Matthew. There seems to be a comparison between Israel's perversion of the old covenant, thus making it one of works, and the covenant of grace. The Jews hired at the beginning of the day were displeased and murmured when they witnessed the calling of grace to others at the close of the day. The difference between the first servants hired by agreement and the other unemployed servants sent into the vineyard is obvious. The first group bargained with the housemaster; the last four groups unquestioningly trusted in his generosity. The ones who bargained were dissatisfied; the others confided in the housemaster and were filled with joy.

The principle doctrine of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard is the grace of the sovereign God. Grace equalizes the standing of all Christians (Col. 2:9, 10). All are positionally equal in Christ, because we are what we are by God's grace. Grace equalizes our standing, but it does not guarantee the equality of either our condition or our rewards. One who is newly born of God is just as much in Christ as the person who has been in Christ for years and has diligently served Him. We are complete in Christ, and nothing can be added to our union with Him.

The first workers who entered the vineyard made a bargain with the housemaster. Those who bargain with God get only the bargain. Christ said of the Pharisees, "...They have their reward" (see Matt. 6:1-5). They did things to be seen by men, and their being seen by men was their reward. Bargaining is not foreign to untaught Christians. They often bargain with God in times of adversity, illness, etc. This shows the need for doctrinal instruction. How can one think or walk correctly without instruction? All-night prayer meetings with the idea of getting a revival is contrary to Scripture. Such an attitude indicates the supposition that God will give a revival if we pray all night. Praying for revival with that attitude may be described as "a quarter in the slot religion." You put in your

quarter, and out comes your religious candy. We must never argue that because we do something we are entitled to something in return. The Lord is sovereign, and He gives what He will to His own.

The first group who entered the vineyard kept a record of what all the others did and the length of time they worked. They could not perform because they were watching what others were doing. This same spirit will to an extent invade Christians who are not on guard. Men are unable to determine successes and failures. We must leave the bookkeeping to God and desire nothing but God's glory. We must be prepared for surprises in God's work, because we never know what will take place in God's providence. This is a complete reversal from the world's materialistic outlook. The world is turned upside down by grace. The secret of happiness and contentment is not watching the clock and trying to assess the amount of work someone else is doing or keeping a record of the work done. But it is forgetting everything but the glory of God and the principle of grace that has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Some come into the service of Christ in the early hours of life and some in the eleventh hour. Some are not saved by God's grace until they are elderly, but grace equalizes all Christians.

The first laborers who entered the vineyard murmured, thus manifesting they were religious Pharisees. The record does not state that any of the others murmured. Since the first workers did not have the correct perspective of grace, they broke out in open rebellion. They murmured not because the housemaster did not live up to the contract but because the later workers received an equal amount for their labor. In reality, they murmured because they did not receive more than their contract stated.

The Greek verb for murmur (*goggudzo*, which means to

murmur, complain, whisper, mutter, or say anything in a low tone) is used seven times. It is attributed to the workmen who had worked long hours in the heat of the day (Matt. 20:11); the scribes and Pharisees murmured against the disciples (Luke 5:30); the Jews murmured against Christ (John 6:41, 43); many of Christ's followers murmured at His saying (John 6:61); the people murmured against Christ (John 7:32); and the Israelites murmured against Moses (I Cor. 10:10). The noun *goggusmos* is used four times. There was much murmuring among the people (John 7:12) and murmuring at the assembly in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1). The Philippians were admonished to do all things without murmuring (Phil. 2:14), and Peter urged the saints to be hospitable to one another without complaint (I Pet. 4:9). The noun *geggustes* is used in Jude 16.

Because of the murmurers' attitude, they were not the first to be paid (Matt. 20:8, 16). Rewards are the result of God's grace, not of service rendered from an incorrect motive. Peter's question, "what shall we have?" evidenced that he had not fully understood the subject of rewards. He was looking at rewards through the world's eyeglasses. This might have been a natural question from the world's viewpoint, but not from God's. Christ's answer is difficult to understand for people who think as men.

The first workers adhered to what they called justice; the latter enjoyed grace. Some say that the malcontent were fretting as victims of jealousy, not under a sense of injustice. They begrudged the housemaster's generosity. The murmurers complained that while they worked in the heat of the day, the others worked only in the cool of the day. All were justly paid: "Take that which is yours, and be going your way; but I desire to give to this last man as I also gave to you" (Matt. 20:14—translation). A person's reward is measured by the quality and not the quantity of his service.



All the recipients of grace including Peter, a stone, are living stones united to the Lord Jesus Christ, the massive living Rock: “You also, as living stones, are being built [present passive indicative of *oikodomeo*] a spiritual house, for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5—translation). The elect Gentiles who were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, “having been built [aorist passive participle of *oikodomeo*] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...being fitted together [present passive participle of *sunarmologeō*] into a holy shrine [*naos*, temple] in the Lord” (Eph. 2:20, 21—translation).

The Holy Spirit chose the noun *naos* rather than the nominal adjective *hieron*, which is often used as a noun, to describe the spiritual temple that Jesus Christ is building (Eph. 2:21). The adjective *hieron* always refers to a physical building. It could be a temple for the Jews or a shrine for Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:27). The noun *naos*, unlike the adjective *hieron*, refers not only to the temple in Jerusalem but also to the restored temple in the last days, the shrine of Diana, the body of a believer, the body of Christ, the spiritual body of Christ, or the heavenly temple. Believers are being built together (present passive indicative of *sunoikodomeo*) into a dwelling place (accusative neuter singular of *katoiketerion*, an abode or dwelling place—used only in Eph. 2:22 and Rev. 18:2) of God.

Believers being built into an abode of God is the reason for the imperative use of the participle *apotithemi* (put away) in I Peter 2:1-3—“Therefore put away all evil, and all deceit, and hypocrisies, and jealousies, and all slanders. As newborn infants, desire the uncorrupted spiritual milk, in order that you by it may grow, with [*eis*, accusative of result] regard to salvation, since you tasted for yourselves that the Lord is merciful” (translation). The word “therefore” introduces a

statement caused by what immediately precedes it. Therefore, “Having been regenerated, not out of perishable but imperishable seed, by the word of God, living and continuing to live” (I Pet. 1:23—translation). The command to lay aside evil, deceit, hypocrisies, jealousies, and slanders has been misinterpreted as an aorist participle, meaning having put away. But this is an imperative use of the participle, and it is in the middle voice, teaching that these are things the individual himself must do with the help of the Holy Spirit who abides in him. Christians never arrive at the place where we do not have to mortify the deeds of the body.

The person who has been given life to live a life conformed to the will of God does and continues to do the things that will glorify God. Otherwise, he cannot grow. Those who have been born again intensely yearn for the uncorrupted milk of God’s word in order that we may grow. Only those who have complied with the command to lay aside the things mentioned in I Peter 2:1 grow to maturity and full salvation. Growth results not from a corrupt message but from the uncorrupted message.

Peter used the analogy of a breast-fed infant who refuses anything but its mother’s milk to describe the Christian’s intense yearning for uncorrupted spiritual milk. The people to whom Peter wrote had tasted (aorist middle indicative of *geuomai*, which means had come to know, or you tasted for yourselves) for themselves that the Lord is gracious (I Pet. 2:3). Tasting is an individual experience. Furthermore, they had “obtained [aorist active participle of *lagchano*, which means to obtain or receive] equally precious [accusative of *histimos*, equally precious, valuable] faith” (II Pet. 1:1—translation).

Since God gave us life, we are commanded to “...grow [present active imperative of *auxano*] in [locative of sphere]

the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (II Pet. 3:18 NASB). A person does not grow into grace, but the redeemed, regenerated, and converted person grows in the sphere of grace. (1) Growth in grace is a process, but there is a sense in which we cannot grow in grace. There is no growth in God’s free gift of grace, the new birth, God’s giving the new life, or one’s position in Jesus Christ. We cannot grow in election, predestination, foreordination, etc. (2) There is a sense in which we do grow. We grow objectively but not subjectively. Every living thing has within it the principle of growth, and every Christian has within him the principle of spiritual growth. This growth is not measured by time or feelings, and it does not take place as a result of religious works. It comes by the sincere uncorrupted word of God, and the fruit of that will be service and works. The growth is measured by the power of Godliness, pruning, cultivation, etc. (3) Christ gives grace, and He gives more grace (James 4:6). He is the object of knowledge. Grace and knowledge advance side by side, the theoretical and the practical. Knowledge of Christ is not the same as the knowledge of a creed.

Scripture uses all five human senses to speak of faith. By faith we come to know the Lord is gracious. The regenerated person in his conversion tastes the mercy of God by faith (I Pet. 2:3), touches Jesus Christ by faith (Mark 5:27-34), sees the glory of God by faith (Is. 45:22), hears the word of God by faith (Is. 55:3), and smells the fragrance of Jesus Christ by faith (Ps. 45:8).

### **Living Stones Sanctified Positionally And Progressively**

In I Peter 2:9, the apostle Peter revealed to those “peculiar people” (KJB) (*peripoiesis*, which means a people for God’s

possession) the exceeding and precious privileges they were having in the present as well as those they would have in the future. In their regeneration, God positionally sanctified them. As soon as one is made alive in Jesus Christ, positional sanctification is completed; but progressive sanctification is begun and continues throughout the Christian life on earth. Progressive sanctification is not by one definite act of the Holy Spirit in the believer, but it is a process through growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18). Hence, the sin problem in the Christian life is not one of justification but of sanctification. Christ's death dealt with the judicial aspect of sin; His life is now dealing with the practical aspect of sin.

God's will is that all Christians be progressively sanctified: "Finally therefore, brothers, we are asking you and exhorting you in the Lord Jesus, even as you received from us how you ought to be walking and to be pleasing God, as indeed you are walking, so that you may abound more. For you have known what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is God's will, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication; that each one of you to have known how to control his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, even as also the Gentiles who have not known God; that no one be transgressing and defrauding the matter of his brother because the avenger of all these is the Lord, as indeed we told you before and solemnly testified. For God called us not to uncleanness, but in the sphere of holiness. Therefore, the one rejecting is rejecting not man but God, even the One giving His Holy Spirit to us" (I Thess. 4:1-8—translation). The truth of sanctification is taught in the Old Testament: "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you.... Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls

abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev. 20:7, 8, 25, 26).

The Greek noun *hagiasmos*, translated sanctification, is used in the sense of separation from that which is impure and of man’s relationship with God (Rom. 6:19, 22; I Cor. 1:30; I Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 1:2). The Greek verb *hagiazō*, translated to sanctify or to set apart, is a derivative of *hagios*, which expresses the idea of separation. The verb means to place in a relation to God which answers to His holy character. In the pagan world, it means to set apart to pagan gods. But in the sphere of the faith God has given to His people, it means to set apart for the only true God. Setting apart for the Greek worshipper was depraved and sinful. On the other hand, the Christian has been set apart by the Holy Spirit in regeneration to a life of holiness. The verb *hagiazō* is used several ways: (1) mentally setting apart the Lord God in our hearts (I Pet. 3:15); (2) the Lord having set Jesus Christ apart for a certain task (John 10:36), or our setting apart ourselves for the Master’s use (II Tim. 2:21); (3) the subjective work of the Holy Spirit—positional sanctification (I Cor. 1:2); (4) an unsaved mate in marriage being sanctified by the believing mate (I Cor. 7:14); (5) Christ’s expiatory work at Calvary (Heb. 10:10); (6) the believer’s separation from the world (John 17:17); and (7) food set apart by the word of God and prayer (I Tim. 4:4, 5).

There are four Greek adjectives for sanctification: (1) *hieros*, which means sacred in reference to things, not persons (I Cor. 9:13; II Tim. 3:15); (2) *hosios*, which is applied not only to things but also to God and Jesus Christ (Acts 2:27; I Tim. 2:8; Heb. 7:26; etc.); (3) *hagnos*, which means freedom from defilement in an ethical sense (II Cor. 7:11; 11:2); (4)

*hagios*, which is used as a name for the Christian (Rom. 1:7). The saint has a holy standing before God (I Cor. 1:30) with the responsibility of living a holy life for God (I Pet. 1:15, 16, which is a quotation from Lev. 11:44). This adjective is used many times in Scripture.

Sanctification is not sinless perfection. Those who believe in sinless perfection say one must take Christ twice, once for justification and once for sanctification. They are in error to think we are so renewed in the image of our mind as to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, and that regeneration is an instantaneous change from entire sinfulness to entire holiness. When pressed on the issue, perfectionists modify their position by altering their statement from freedom from all sin to freedom from all known sin. Some among them go from freedom from known sin to entire consecration to God. However, sin is sin whether or not it is recognized.

The fundamental error of perfectionism is its low view of God's law and its narrow conception of sin. It is ludicrous to say one can obey God's law only if he can make God's law what he wants it to be, because God could not give a law which a sinner could obey. The law demands perfection. It is a transcript of God's holy nature. Regeneration, therefore, makes the dominant disposition holy, but many affections remain unholy and require continual cleansing.

Subsequent to regeneration, the Holy Spirit continues His work by sanctification in the one He has made alive. There is no break between regeneration and practical sanctification. They are two parts of one whole in preparing us for the eternal kingdom. The Lord regenerates no one He does not sanctify. Sanctification logically follows regeneration like faith follows ordination (Acts 13:48) and holiness follows election (Eph. 1:4). Progressive sanctification takes up where positional sanctification stops. The holy disposition in the believer

is maintained and strengthened by sanctification (Eph. 4:23, 24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2). Positional sanctification makes the approach to God possible, and progressive sanctification makes the fellowship with Him possible. We not only come to Christ but we also continue coming to Him.

The work of Jesus Christ is twofold. (1) Christ's work on the cross effected regeneration. This was His work for us. It was all done by Him. We could do nothing for ourselves. (2) Christ's work in us by the Holy Spirit brings about our sanctification. By Christ's work for us, a right relation with God is established for the elect. By God's work in us, a right attitude toward God is effected in the regenerated elect. Regeneration is instantaneous; sanctification of the regenerated is progressive. Salvation is threefold: (1) The past fact is that justification is before God not by a person's faith but by the faithfulness of Christ and His work at Calvary. All the elect of God whether or not they have been regenerated and have had a conversion experience are already justified before God by Christ's finished work 2,000 years ago. (2) The present process of salvation is our sanctification. (3) Our future salvation will be our glorification, at which time the body will be redeemed.

Sanctification does not signify present perfection. It means progress of the principle of life toward perfection. Progressive sanctification is not deliverance from the penalty of sin. It is the development of the Christian life to conquer sin. By sanctification, the Christian is enabled more and more to mortify sin (Col. 3:5). Pruning is necessary to the Christian life (John 15:2). In regeneration, the elected one receives the principle of life which governs the soul. Although the sin principle remains, we must not allow it to reign. Evil tendencies must be subdued. We have nothing to do with regeneration, but we do have something to do with sanctification by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit

enables us to overcome sin as we study God's word and learn how to overcome it. Sin dwells in a believer, but it does not reign in him. Death "in" sin is our natural condition. Christ's death "for" our sin is our judicial position. Our death "to" sin is our sanctified condition. Sanctification does not justify, but justification sanctifies.

The eternal God is the Agent of sanctification. The Father sanctifies: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly..." (I Thess. 5:23). The Son sanctifies: "That he [Christ] might sanctify and cleanse it [the assembly] with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26). The Holy Spirit sanctifies: "...being sanctified by the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" (Rom. 15:16). Although sanctification is the work of the Triune God, it is ascribed more particularly to the Holy Spirit. He is the agent of the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit uses both internal and external means in progressive sanctification. The internal means are faith working by love (Gal. 5:6), hope making not ashamed (Rom. 5:5), rejoicing with joy unspeakable (I Pet. 1:8), and the peace of God keeping our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:7). The external means are the Scriptures (John 17:17; I Pet. 1:22, 23; 2:2), prayer (John 14:13, 14; Acts 2:42), and providential discipline (John 15:2; Rom. 5:3, 4; Heb. 12:5-11). Sanctification is not merely felt. The internal and the external work together, but the internal precedes the external.

The believer cooperates with God the Holy Spirit in the use of means in sanctification. Sanctification is both grace and a duty. Regeneration, unlike sanctification, is the sole work of God. Therefore, regeneration is a grace but not a duty. Cooperation does not mean the believer is an independent agent in the work. Cooperation follows from warnings given by God (Rom. 12:9, 16, 17; Gal. 5:16-23) through exhortations (Rom. 6:12; Heb. 6:1, 2). Progressive sanctification does not begin



within. The objective Savior as well as subjective truth must come first (Heb. 12:1, 2; II Cor. 3:18). There can be no genuine progressive sanctification apart from truth. Conditionally, we must be exposed to the objective truth of God. Where people are not taught the Scriptures, there is little sanctification. Sanctified people act according to the revelation of God's mind. Boasting of sanctification is not sanctification but a manifestation of flesh.

Sanctification includes the whole man: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 5:23). Feeding the mind alone is insufficient. With mental knowledge alone there is no application to the soul (affections) or the body. Sanctification affects the higher rational and spiritual part of man's nature, which is the spirit (*pneuma*), because it was corrupted by the fall (Rom. 1:28; Titus 1:15). It also affects the inferior intelligence which is the soul (*psuche*), because it was corrupted by the fall (Eph. 4:18). Sanctification affects the body, because it was corrupted by the fall (Rom. 1:24-28).

As the fall began with the spirit, passed through the soul, and reached the body, the grace of God, by means of the Holy Spirit within, begins with the spirit, passes to the soul, and reaches the body. The Holy Spirit in regeneration works on the mind, and this affects the affections and body—the whole man. Where spiritual perception is dim, bodily appetite is strong. Knowledge of Scripture enables one by the Spirit to properly control his body. Weak faith justifies one before his conscience, but the degree of sanctification is measured by the strength of one's faith in the faith once delivered to the saints. Absolute perfection is not reached in this life. Perfection of the spirit, soul, and body will take place at the time of the Christian's physical death and resurrection.

The three things that proceed from sin are guilt, penalty, and stain. This is why we are told in II Corinthians 7:1 to cleanse ourselves: “THEREFORE, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (NASB). We are already cleansed from the guilt and penalty of sin. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ removed the guilt; His satisfaction removed the penalty; progressive sanctification removes the stain. Both guilt and penalty are out of the question in the Christian; but he, being conscious of his conditional uncleanness, confesses his sins in order to be forgiven.

The people to whom Peter wrote had been united with the Living Stone. Union with the Living Stone had made the subjects of Peter’s Epistles living stones, constituent parts of a great spiritual company in order that we might be lights shining in a dark world. Hence, Peter gave a Divine commentary on Matthew 16:18. His Epistles are not local assembly Epistles. They are general Epistles dealing not only with God’s property, the living stones, but also with the eschatological kingdom of which the living stones are heirs and of which he himself had already experienced a foretaste.

Christ’s possession that is being called out is also being prepared for the kingdom. Although the kingdom is future to us as the living stones, we are acquainted with our present blessings and responsibilities. Despite the roughness of the living stones, we are constantly drawing near the Living Stone we have tasted (I Pet. 2:3) and will become like (I John 3:2). Having been regenerated, the recipients of grace yield to the tools of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The difference between Jesus Christ as the Living Stone and believers as living stones might be compared with the inadequate analogy of the difference between the Rock of Gibraltar and the small rocks that rest on that massive rock.

Union of the living stones with the Living Stone gives security and assurance. Hence, the believing ones “may by no means [*ou me*, double negative with the subjunctive] be disappointed” (I Pet. 2:6—translation). Jesus Christ is “the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16) and is represented by the metaphors of “living water” (John 4:10), “living bread” (John 6:51), and the “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20). Therefore, the saints’ security and assurance are climaxed in Christ’s statement to His disciples, “...because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). By faith we intellectually grasp this truth.

There is a sharp contrast between those who believe and those who stumble. Christ is metaphorized not only as the Living Stone, but also as the Stone that was “disallowed”—rejected—by the builders, the One over whom the nonelect stumble. Therefore, the contrast is between those who were “appointed” (aorist passive indicative of *tithemi*, to appoint or destine) to stumble and those chosen for Christ’s possession (I Pet. 2:8, 9). The world rejects both the Living Stone and living stones.

Jesus Christ is the refuge for the elect, but He is the One over whom the nonelect will stumble and by whom they shall be crushed. A fact that cannot be ignored or forgotten is that no person, elect or nonelect, can avoid Jesus Christ. Every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus Christ is either the Living Stone on whom the elect are secure and build, or He is the Stone against whom the nonelect stumble and by whom they shall be condemned with eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord.

The estimate of Jesus Christ by the nonelect is reprehensible to the elect. One of the great signs of apostasy is the way professing Christendom receives the world’s care and car-

esses. The world hates Christ (John 15:18), but it loves the money it makes from the perverted holidays brought into existence by professing Christendom. Therefore, the world can afford to promote that which professing Christendom celebrates and so-called Christians enjoy as much as the world. The answer to this is found in Christ's statement to the Pharisees: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). The last part of the aforementioned text is a principle by which Christians measure things in a world that is full of glamour, hypocrisy, and deception.

Jesus Christ's being the Living Stone or foundation and His being the cornerstone are distinct. As we have already seen, the word foundation comes from the Greek word *themelios*, which means foundation of a building, of faith, of teaching, or of an assembly (Luke 6:48; I Tim. 6:19; Eph. 2:20; I Cor. 3:10-12). On the other hand, the word cornerstone (*akrogoniaios*) means corner foundation. It has been described as the cornerstone which holds two walls together (Eph. 2:20; I Pet. 2:6). Jesus Christ is the common bond who holds together both regenerated Jews and regenerated Gentiles in His assembly (Eph. 2:12-18). Jesus Christ is the binding power which cements the living stones, who have come from all nations and walks of life, into what He calls His spiritual house, chosen race, royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for His possession (I Pet. 2:5, 9). This is the assembly Jesus Christ is building.

### **Living Stones Suffering Prior To The Kingdom**

Peter had to learn that both the suffering Savior and the suffering assembly in a hostile world precede the kingdom:

“And having taken Him to himself, Peter began to rebuke Him, saying, May God be merciful to you Lord! this shall by no means happen to you. But He turning, said to Peter, You get behind Me Satan! you are being an offense to Me; because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:22, 23—translation). As members of the assembly of Jesus Christ we are called to suffer, but as heirs of the kingdom we shall reign. Those who say the saints of God are presently reigning are not considering what Paul said to Timothy: “If we suffer [present active indicative of *hupomeno*, which means to endure, stand firm, or persevere], we shall also reign with him [future active indicative of *sumbasileuo*, to reign with]...” (II Tim. 2:12). Paul went from a present active indicative verb following a first class condition article (assumed to be true) to a future active indicative verb. Thus, it can be translated, “Since we are enduring [persecution], we shall also reign with Him [Christ is the subject of the context].” (Study II Tim. 2:7-13.)

A consideration of II Timothy 2:12 in the light of its context and overall context will show that this is the age of suffering. The assembly and the kingdom cannot be synonymous terms because we suffer in the assembly but not in the kingdom. Instead of reigning, Paul was in prison when he wrote this Epistle to Timothy, his child (*teknon*) (II Tim. 2:1). Timothy was an adult who had been ministering to the Ephesians and was encountering serious problems. Paul instructed him in the way to care for those problems. Timothy was not Paul’s child in the flesh, but he was his spiritual child as a result of Paul’s tutoring. The term child was frequently used by Paul in reference to Timothy. Paul wrote the Epistle “To beloved child Timothy: Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (II Tim. 1:2—translation).

Paul commanded Timothy to be strong in the sphere of grace. In II Timothy 2:1, the Greek verb *endunamou* is the

present passive imperative of *endunamoo*. This compound word made up of *en*, which means “in,” and *dunamis*, which means “power,” signifies to be empowered within. Empowerment within refers to the inner man being renewed or strengthened. Capability for service results from being strengthened within. An inner power comes from more grace which comes as a result of a greater understanding of God’s word (James 4:6).

The apostle entrusted Timothy with the things he had heard through him in order that he in turn might commit them to faithful men (II Tim. 2:2). The authority of elders is a completed revelation of God’s word (Jude 3), and it should be committed to faithful men that they might be capable of teaching others.

Paul, who was in prison for preaching the truth, appealed to Timothy to suffer hardship with him (II Tim. 2:3). A good soldier of Jesus Christ will not involve himself with the affairs of this life in order that he may please the One having drafted him. He will compete lawfully by following the regulations given in the Scripture. The Lord gives understanding to those who consider what He has said. God does not give us understanding of anything in Scripture of which we are ignorant. Therefore, we must study; get the Scriptures in mind; and then the Lord will enable us to put them together.

Timothy was commanded to remember Jesus Christ, the seed of David, who has been raised from the dead “according to my gospel” (II Tim. 2:8). The gospel was Paul’s in the sense that it was entrusted to him. The apostle was undergoing hardship as an evildoer to the extent of bonds because of his preaching the gospel. The ones without grace will treat the proclaimer of the gospel as an evildoer. Although Paul was bound, the word of God has not been bound and will never be bound (perfect passive indicative of *deo*, II Tim. 2:9). The

apostle's maltreatment which brought about his suffering followed his exaltation of the sovereignty of God in salvation (II Tim. 2:9-11). "For this reason I am suffering these things; but I am not ashamed; for I have known [perfect active indicative of *eido*] whom I have believed [perfect active indicative of *pisteuo*], and I have been convinced [perfect passive indicative of *peitho*] that He is able to protect my deposit until that day" (II Tim. 1:12—translation). In spite of suffering from false teachers, etc., God is controlling all, and His truth will be preserved. Therefore, Paul endured all things on account of God's chosen ones in order that we also might know our deliverance in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Members of the assembly of Jesus Christ have been entrusted with God's truth; therefore, we are to disseminate it. As we do so, we will encounter warfare which will result in suffering, because this is the age of suffering. However, our present suffering cannot compare with our future glory.

Those who assume they are reigning in the assembly are as deceived as the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote: "Now [*ede*, an adverb meaning now or already] you are [present active indicative of *eimi*] the ones having been satisfied [perfect passive participle of *korennumi*, which means to have enough, to be full, contented, or satisfied], now [*ede*] you became rich [aorist active indicative of *plouteo*, which means to become rich], you reigned [aorist active indicative of *basileuo*, which means to be king, to reign, or exercise kingly power] without [*choris*, an adverbial preposition, which is the ablative of separation] us [ablative plural pronoun of *hemeis*]; I wish [*ophelon*, a verbal particle introducing an unattainable wish, meaning I wish, ought, oh that, or would to God] indeed [*ge*, an enclitic particle, emphasizing *ophelon*—the word with which it is associated] that you reigned [aorist active indicative of *basileuo*] as kings in order that [*hina*, a subordinating conjunction, a conjunction of purpose] we [*hemeis*] also [*kai*,

a conjunction] may reign with [aorist active subjunctive of *sumbasileuo*, which means to share kingship with someone] you [*humeis*]" (I Cor. 4:8—translation). The Corinthians who had dispensed with humiliation and were claiming exaltation had no right to claim they were presently reigning. This is not the age for reigning but for serving and suffering. In his defense of his God-given authority, Paul corrected the Corinthians' erroneous assumption.

In Paul's message in I Corinthians, the apostle was expressing to the Corinthians in a sardonic tone the opposite of his intended meaning. Were they so deceived that they assumed they were reigning? Can a Christian honestly say the Corinthians were reigning while they were divided among themselves (ch. 1), were carnal and walking as men (ch. 3), were insensitive of sin that must be exterminated (ch. 5), were going to civil law against their brothers (ch. 6), were puffed up with knowledge which they thought they had (ch. 8), had the wrong attitude about Paul (ch. 9), were compared with Israel's failures (ch. 10), had disorder at the Lord's table which brought sickness and death (ch. 11), and had confusion over languages (ch. 14)? Conclusively, why are those who say they are already reigning not consistent and say with the Laodiceans, "We have need of nothing"? (Rev. 3:17). Suffering for the cause of Christ is present, but reigning is future. How can the present be synonymous with the future?

While the Corinthians assumed they were reigning, Paul was not reigning. He was suffering, and he was having to deal with an assembly that was so filled with carnality and problems that needed to be set in order that he knew they were not reigning. Paul told them the truth about themselves and contrasted them with himself and the other apostles. He could not have been more caustic than showing the difference between the apostles' being viewed by the world as fools and the Corinthians' thinking themselves prudent in Christ. He



told them the apostles were weak, but they thought themselves strong. The apostles were without honor, but they were held in honor. The apostles hungered, thirsted, were poorly clothed, maltreated, had no certain dwelling place, worked to support themselves in order to proclaim the gospel, were persecuted and slandered, became as rubbish, etc. (I Cor. 4:9-13). The Corinthians could say they were reigning, but they did not indicate that they were: "For the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power" (I Cor. 4:20—translation). The power refers to the coming of Jesus Christ in power and great glory (Matt. 24:30).

### **Living Stones Deny Self**

Instruction is given to Christians concerning our attitude toward one another as we labor together for the Lord and await His kingdom. Christian unity is the goal of every recipient of grace. The unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) differs from the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13). The former is positional, and the child of God had nothing to do with his position. The latter is the unity of the faith resulting from knowledge of the system of truth God has delivered to His people, and the results are conditional. We are progressively united as we grow in the knowledge of the word of God. Fellowship can be united and diverse at the same time but not when major principles are questioned. Paul will not allow us to get away from the present by contemplating the future: "And this having known the time, that it is the hour for you to be raised out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is advanced [almost gone]; the day has come near. May we therefore be done with the works of darkness.... But you put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the sinful nature, to arouse its desires" (Rom. 13:11, 12, 14—translation).

God has given us commandments. A commandment from God means God has the right to order, demand, require with authority, have control over, or be the master of. An excuse for not obeying God's commandments is an evasion, seeking to remove the blame for something, being released from an obligation or duty, offering a reason for being excused, or the act of excusing. Jesus Christ said those who love Him will keep His commandments. Disobeying God's commandments deprives Christians of present blessings and future rewards.

Two imperatives in Romans 13:14 are the commands to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to not make provision for the flesh. Other imperatives are recorded in Romans 14:1, 3, and 5. An outstanding passage concerning God's commandments is I Thessalonians 5:11-28. There are about twenty imperatives recorded in these verses, although two of them can be either indicative verbs or imperatives. (1) Comfort yourselves together (v. 11); (2) edify one another (v. 11); (3) you do (v. 11); (4) be at peace among yourselves (v. 13); (5) warn the unruly (v. 14); (6) comfort the feebleminded (v. 14); (7) support the weak (v. 14); (8) be patient toward all (v. 14); (9) see that none render evil for evil (v. 15); (10) follow that which is good (v. 15); (11) rejoice evermore (v. 16); (12) pray without ceasing (v. 17); (13) give thanks in everything (v. 18); (14) do not quench the Spirit (v. 19); (15) do not despise prophesyings (v. 20); (16) prove all things (v. 21); (17) hold fast that which is good (v. 21); (18) abstain from all appearance of evil (v. 22); (19) pray for us (v. 25); and (20) greet all the brothers (v. 26).

### **Mutual Toleration—**

Mutual toleration is characteristic of Christians as we labor together and await the kingdom. Many of the synonyms for toleration cannot be used to describe the toleration taught in Romans 14:1-12. The word itself can be used as indulgence

or overlooking something someone does, forgiveness, forbearance, longsuffering, leniency or humaneness, liberalness, patience, etc. There is a sense in which we can tolerate certain things, but Christians have to know where to draw the line. We are to be forgiving, but we cannot forgive a person who has not first been forgiven by God. We can also be lenient in the sense of humaneness, but we must draw a line there. Liberalism or broad-minded free thinking cannot be tolerated. We must all have the mind of Christ, and those with the mind of Christ will speak His mind: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing...” (I Cor. 1:10).

Paul described God’s required behavior for the stronger brother toward the weaker brother. A stronger Christian is responsible to welcome a brother weaker in the faith: “Now welcome [present middle imperative of *proslambanomai*, which means welcome, receive, or accept] the one being weak [present active participle of *astheneo*, which means physical sickness, impotence, a weak person, weak through the flesh, or weak in the faith] in the faith, not with the view of arguing about opinions” (Rom. 14:1—translation). The strength of the stronger brother and the weakness of the weaker brother is in the faith. The word faith is used three ways in Scripture: (1) the faith by which one is justified before his consciousness (Rom. 5:1), (2) Jesus Christ Himself (Gal. 3:23), and (3) the system of truth (Phil. 1:27; Jude 3). The strength and weakness of the brothers here is in the system of truth—the principles of God. As a result of being weak in “the” faith, one is weak in faith. The strong brother is more spiritual; therefore, he should strengthen the weaker brother: “Brothers, if a man be taken by surprise in some sin, you the spiritual ones, be restoring such a one in the spirit of meekness; being concerned about yourself, lest you also may be tempted. You be bearing one another’s burdens, and so you shall fulfill the

law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1, 2—translation). The strong brother is the spiritual one, because he knows the mind of God.

A weak brother must be willing to be indoctrinated by the minister. Where should we draw the line with a weak brother? How long should his burdens and infirmities be borne? He must not be permitted to dictate the policies of the assembly. God is the policy maker, and His ministers declare His policy. Both he and the people to whom he ministers must give account to God. Does a child in its infantile weakness give law to its parents? Parents who devote most of their attention to a weak child will have a substandard home. Constant devotion to a weak brother will cause others in the assembly to be weak. Christian conduct must be governed by God’s word and not by the untutored conscience of a weak brother. We cannot look at this portion of Scripture and say that when the weak take control, we must tolerate them and bear their burdens. Most assemblies are doctrinally weak because the preacher is weak, and he has been listening to weak people. Therefore, the people cannot be indoctrinated and grow in grace.

People are not to be welcomed into the assembly with a view of arguing about opinions. They are received for the purpose of edification. Many come into an assembly with a desire to teach, but they have never been taught. A person’s motive for uniting with an assembly should be for his edification.

Paul was dealing with the scrupulous conscience of weak Christians in Romans 14:1-12. The weak in this instance were Jews who had been saved from Judaism but were clinging to their Judaistic teaching concerning eating meats that had been sacrificed to idols. The same subject of eating meat from animals sacrificed to idols was discussed in Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8. Some were weak in the knowledge of God’s

principles concerning eating meat. Eating all meats is neither morally nor scripturally wrong when they are received with thanksgiving. But these young Christians could not endure the idea of eating an animal that had been offered to a false god. Therefore, they ate only vegetables. The one eating meat must not reject the scrupulous brother but should give him a chance to increase in Biblical knowledge. After being taught on a given subject, a child of God will accept the truth. The one eating should not criticize the one not eating, because God has received the brother for Himself. The weak brother will embrace the truth because he is a recipient of God's grace, and God gives every Christian spiritual discernment to know the word of God when he hears it. When God receives a person to Himself, He is able to make that person stand.

One's scrupulous conscience can never be the standard for Christian conduct. Conviction must rest on Divine revelation and the exposition of all Scripture. Differences of opinion among Christians arise from ignorance, prejudice, customs, traditions, etc., all of which have their root in one's ignorance of Biblical truth. Mature Christians are less scrupulous about prejudices, customs, and traditions. All religionists are filled with prejudices and customs. But our degree of spirituality is not determined by prejudice and custom. As we grow in grace and knowledge of God's word, prejudices and customs will diminish and depart.

Spiritually mature Christians cannot expect spiritually immature Christians to practice the deeper things of God's word until they have been properly instructed. The weak must first be indoctrinated, and then they will be convinced in their own minds. The weak Roman Christians had come out of Judaism, and they continued holding to their tradition. Therefore, they were preferring one religious feast day to another: "For on the one hand there is one who prefers [present active indicative of *krino*] one day to another; on the other hand there is another

who holds [present active indicative of *krino*] every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5—translation). Although the same inflected form of the Greek word *krino* is used twice, it does not hold the same meaning in both instances. Paul was not referring to the Lord’s day (the day on which Christians assemble for worship) or the sabbath (the day observed by the Jews) but the Jews’ religious feast days. The latter part of this verse, “Let each man be fully convinced [present passive imperative of *plerophoreo*] in his own mind,” is a command. A command means to get with it. Christians should thank God for His election, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the objective truth which has been committed to our trust, and His commandments. God’s friends do as He commanded.

God’s commandments must not be used as excuses. Every Christian is to be fully convinced in his own mind concerning any Biblical principle. The person sins who, after some time of subjection to the word of God, continues unconvinced concerning Biblical principles to which he has been exposed, because God commanded every believer to be convinced in his own mind. Many preachers, anxious to gain members, compromise by telling prospective members that they are unsettled on certain Biblical subjects. After a number of years they conveniently remain unsettled. Every man of God is obligated to study God’s word to find God’s answer so that he will be fully convinced in his own mind. Every recipient of grace desires to know God’s word and will seek an answer to those things on which he is unsettled.

God’s command to be fully persuaded in one’s mind gives no one the right to private judgment. The standard for judging is the word of God, not one’s opinion. Our conviction should be guided by our responsibility to the Lord: “For whether we may live, we are living to the Lord; or if we may die, we are

dying to the Lord: therefore, whether we may live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). Jesus Christ died and lived in order that He shall be Lord of both dead and living ones. Therefore, stronger brothers cannot reject weaker brothers for their observance of feast days. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess to God.

### **Brotherly Obligation—**

Brotherly obligation is taught in Romans 14:13-23. Instead of judging one another, we should judge ourselves lest we put a snare before our brother. Paul had known and had been permanently convinced in the Lord that nothing in itself is unclean except to the one reasoning anything to be unclean. If a stronger brother ate meat that grieved his weaker brother, he was no longer walking in love. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. The one serving Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore, we should strive for the things of peace and the things for the purpose of strengthening one another. This comes through edification in God's word. We must not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. It is good neither to eat flesh, drink wine, or do anything by which our brother stumbles. The faith which one has he should be having to himself before God. The one not condemning himself in what he approves is happy. But the one hesitating has been condemned if he may eat because it is not out of faith, and everything which is not out of faith is sin.

The knowledge of precepts is insufficient. That knowledge must be put into practice. Four precepts with their required practices are given in Romans 14:14-23.

1. **PRECEPT**—"I have known, and have been convinced in the Lord Jesus, that nothing in itself is unclean; except to

the one reasoning anything to be unclean, to that one it is unclean” (v. 14—translation). **PRACTICE**—“But if because of food your brother is being grieved, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not ruin with your food that one on behalf of whom Christ died. Let not therefore your good be blasphemed” (vv. 15, 16—translation). One subjected to truth will be indoctrinated. Thus, he is progressively coming to the unity of the faith.

2. **PRECEPT**—“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. For the one serving Christ in this is acceptable to God and approved by men” (vv. 17, 18—translation). **PRACTICE**—“So then let us strive for the things of peace and the things for the purpose of strengthening one another” (v. 19—translation). The only way we can strive for peace and unity is by indoctrination.

3. **PRECEPT**—“Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil to the man eating with offense” (v. 20—translation). **PRACTICE**—“It is neither good to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything by which your brother stumbles” (v. 21—translation).

4. **PRECEPT**—“The faith which you have, be having to yourself before God. Happy is the one not condemning himself in what he approves” (v. 22—translation). **PRACTICE**—“But the one hesitating has been condemned if he may eat, because it is not out of faith; and everything which is not out of faith is sin” (v. 23—translation). There is no other verse of Scripture about which there has been so much controversy than Romans 14:23. The word “faith” (*pistis*) is used as an ablative in both instances in the latter part of the verse. The preposition “of” (*ek*) is the ablative of source. Is this faith subjective or objective?



Everyone has some kind of faith. (1) There is a temporary faith, like that described in the parable of the sower: “And the ones on the rock are those, who when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a brief time, and in time of trial become apostates” (Luke 8:13—translation). (2) There is a faith that is built on miracles. Many believed when they saw Christ’s miracles. But He would not commit Himself to them because He knew that their faith was established on miracles, and it was not the product of grace (John 2:23-25). (3) One may say he has faith when it is only vain or empty (I Cor. 15:2, 14). (4) Whatever faith a person dead in trespasses and sins has is also dead (James 2:26). (5) Historical faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is only intellectual. That is no more than believing George Washington was the first president of the United States. (6) That which is called simple faith is merely natural or human faith. There is nothing about faith that is simple. Since it includes the sovereign God, it is complex. (7) The kind of faith the demons have causes them to fear and tremble (James 2:19). (8) God-given faith is saving faith.

No one is regenerated by his faith. Faith is the product of and not the cause of regeneration. Saving faith is God-given (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29). Notice that the Greek word for given in Philippians 1:29 is an aorist passive indicative of *charidzomai*, signifying that the recipient of this God-given faith makes no contribution to its being given. An Arminian definition of faith is that in one sense faith is the gift of God, but it is God’s gift to all who want it; it is not given to all because all will not avail themselves of it, will not yield to the moving of the Holy Spirit, and will not let the regenerating power of God work within them. In contrast, the Bible defines faith as (1) belonging to the covenant of grace, (2) being the gift of God, (3) being the fruit of election and regeneration, (4) being called into action by the objective truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, (5) being the commitment of mind, heart, and

will, (6) being wholly dependent on God, (7) not preceding election in the Divine order, and (8) not preceding regeneration in the order of application.

Paul was writing to Christians in Rome about saving faith when he said, "...which is not out of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23—translation). Having been made alive by the sovereign Spirit, every action by a Christian that is not out of the source of God-given faith displaces his complete dependence on God and becomes an independent action. That is sin. God-given faith is totally, wholly, entirely, completely on God who gave it to the passive sinner. Since this is true in the life of a Christian, the so-called faith of an unregenerate sinner who believes that by his faith he can be born again is not genuine because it is not out of the faith which God gives.

The faith of Romans 14:23 is not merely the capability of believing because of grace. It is a principle formed in the renewed mind by one's God-given ability to discern spiritual things. It is not a sixth sense. In renewing a person by making him a new creature in Christ Jesus, God gives him a new principle formed in the renewed mind by which he is capable of discerning truth when he hears it. The unregenerate do not receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to them because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:14). Hence, the faith in Romans 14:23 is subjective. It is the ability to understand objective faith. How could we know anything about subjective faith without objective truth to test that faith? If one's so-called faith is not responsive to God's objective faith, his faith is not God-given and can be classified as temporary, natural, vain, dead, etc.

The same faith spoken of in Romans 14:23 is taught in other portions of Scripture (Rom. 1:16, 17; 10:17; II Cor. 4:1-6; I Thess. 1:5; 2:13; II Thess. 2:13, 14; II Tim. 1:8-12; James 1:18). "Now faith is the assurance of things being

hoped for, the certainty of things not being seen. For by this the elders were approved” (Heb. 11:1, 2—translation). Faith does not bestow reality where there is none. It does not give assurance where there is none. Subjective faith, which is God’s gift to the elect in regeneration, is only the channel through which objective faith flows. Subjective faith alone does not save. Furthermore, the ability that God has given the regenerated person does not save him. It is the objective truth flowing through his subjective faith and his ability to comprehend and understand that gives him assurance. He has a salvation, not a regeneration, experience. Regeneration is nonexperiential.

Objective faith concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ gives subjective faith assurance, power, and victory. Such faith is anchored to Christ who makes the hope a reality. Distinction must be made between the act of believing and that which is believed. One who denies the Divine Triunity, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that salvation is of God is not saved. Objective truth has not flowed into his faith because his faith was not God-given. It is impossible to judge faith apart from God’s objective truth. God’s objective truth gives validity to the consciousness of the person who has been given the ability to understand. Conclusively, the faith of Romans 14:23 is not merely subjective, but it is subjective faith flowing from objective faith.

“Having been regenerated [perfect passive participle of *anagennao*], not out of [*ek*] perishable, but imperishable seed [ablative of *spora*] the word [ablative of *logos*] of God, living [present active participle of *dzao*] and continuing to live [present active participle of *meno*]” (I Peter 1:23—translation). The origin of new life is taught in I Peter 1:23a, and the support of that life is taught in I Peter 1:23b. We must distinguish the origin of life given by God to the passive recipient of that gift from the support of that life by the word of God.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, was writing to sojourners who had been chosen according to the prearrangement of God the Father by sanctification of the Spirit to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:1, 2), God having given new life (aorist active participle of *anagennao*) to them (I Pet. 1:3). The same Greek word with a different inflected form is found in this verse as in I Peter 1:23. The sojourners “having regenerated us to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from [*ek*, ablative of separation] the dead” (I Pet. 1:3—translation) had double security. An imperishable, unstained, and enduring possession was permanently reserved (perfect passive participle of *tereo*) in the heavens for (*eis*, accusative of purpose) them, and they were being protected by the power of God through faith for a deliverance ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet. 1:4, 5).

These transients had been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Peter warned them in his first Epistle concerning their enemy on the outside, and in his second Epistle, of their enemy on the inside deceiving and seducing. Therefore, this is the time of suffering before we possess the inheritance that awaits us. The key word in the first Epistle is suffering (1:11; 2:23; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1). The suffering Savior first attracts our attention and then the glory follows.

The new life having been given to sojourners was not out of perishable but imperishable seed (ablative of *spora*). Three nouns in the New Testament are translated seed: (1) *spora*—found only in I Peter 1:23; (2) *sporos*—used five times in the New Testament (Mark 4:26, 27; Luke 8:5, 11; II Cor. 9:10); and (3) *sperma*—found 44 times in the New Testament. Among the 44 times *sperma* is found, it is used the following ways: (1) It is used botanically of grain, kernel, or seed of plants (Matt. 13:24, 27, 37, 38). (2) It is used biologically in the sense of human life, semen, offspring, progeny, tribes, races, life-giving power, or descent; all of which are related

to the biological use. (3) It is used as it relates to the principle of spiritual life (I John 3:9).

All of these nouns come from the root verb *speiro*, which is used 49 times in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is to sow seed. However, it is used with a variety of metaphors: (1) sowing the word by witnessing and preaching (John 4:36, 37; I Cor. 9:11), (2) sowing corruption (Gal. 6:7, 8), (3) burial of the human body (I Cor. 15:36, 37, 42, 43, 44), and (4) Christian giving (II Cor. 9:6, 7).

The word “seed” (*spora*) of I Peter 1:23 is used metaphorically in a generative sense. Having been given life by God’s command (Ezek. 16:6; John 5:25), the support of that God-given life is God’s living oracles (Acts 7:38). The living oracles of God are living to living people. Hence, God’s objective truth flows through God-given faith to support the Christian life.

Some disregard the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the passive sinner. Their belief in gospel regeneration fails to distinguish life by means of the Spirit from the support of that life by means of the living and continuing word (*logos*) (I Pet. 1:23b). Furthermore, they do not take into account that God first prepares the soil into which the seed of the gospel is received, heard, and understood; it produces fruit in the only soil that illustrates Christians. The soil of one’s heart must be prepared by divine quickening for his reception of God’s objective message. The nature of the soil determines the outcome of the fruit, and the fruit reveals the character of the soil.

In contrast to earthly relationships, which wither and fall away, the discourse of the Lord continues forever (I Pet. 1:24, 25). The discourse of the Lord that continues forever goes with the word of God that continues to live. Of the two Greek words for “word,” *hrema* is used twice in I Peter 1:25;

whereas, *logou*, which comes from *logos*, is used in I Peter 1:23. The ablative case of *logos* is used in verse 23, and the nominative case of *hrema* is used in both instances in verse 25. The discourse is the confirmation for the support of the born-again person. The two present active participles in verse 23b, “living and continuing to live,” can be taken with either *logou* or *theou* because both are in the ablative case, thus corresponding with through (*dia*), which is the ablative of means.

The prophets and apostles were not originators of the *logos*. They were the agents. The Holy Spirit is the originator of life. The word is the instrument of conversion and then of our sustenance. Life is distinct from the gospel. Hearing is distinct from what is heard. Sight is distinct from what is seen. Quickening is an unaided act. Conversion or support demands assistance by the discourse of the word.

### **Christian Consideration—**

The first thirteen verses of Romans 15 are a continuation of the theme of chapter 14. The strong are obligated to bear the weaknesses of the weak. This is Christianity in practice. Pleasing self hinders fellowship. The example for each of us to try to please his neighbor for the purpose of his good to edification is Jesus Christ’s not pleasing Himself. The definite article “the” preceding Christ in verse 3 distinguishes Christ from false Christs. We do not judge one assembly by another or another believer by ourselves. The standard for judging is Jesus Christ and the word of God.

Paul’s desire was that the God of perseverance and help give the Roman Christians the same thinking among one another according to Christ Jesus “in order that with one mind and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6—translation). This

harmonizes with welcoming the one being weak in the system of truth, not with a view of arguing about opinions (Rom. 14:1). The adverb *omothumadon*, translated “with one mind,” shows the responsibility of members of the assembly of Jesus Christ. This adverb is used eleven times in Acts, and the only other time it is used is here in Romans 15:6. (See Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29.) The word is not always used in a good sense, because the Devil and his crowd speak the same mind.

When truth is given in all its purity and Christians have time to learn the great principles of God’s word, we will be thinking the same things and speaking the same language. The law of love is greater than the law of liberty. Most commentators use Romans 15:6 to teach liberty. They admit they do not have unity but claim they have cooperation. Their cooperation is in their denominations, and they are unconcerned about unity of the spirit and unity of the faith—system of truth. Many say that in chapter 14 we are shown the limitations of Christian liberty. They explain that it is limited in extent and in its rule of action. Therefore, they suppose that we must respect the convictions of others who talk about their faith. Their opinion is that the antagonistic parties—legal and spiritual, conservative and liberal, and weak and strong—are to be reconciled in the one Christian assembly. They assume that Paul never spoke of the idols in Athens in such a way as to wound the feelings of those who believed in them. Preachers who preach all they believe are labeled by them as fools. They advise that men who teach must not do it for the sake of unsettling people, and they should handle honesty prudently. In contrast to the preceding explanations, preachers who, like Paul, declare the whole word of God unsettle people. Wherever Paul went he caused an uproar, turned the world upside down, and made people angry enough to want to kill him for preaching the truth.

What is true Christian liberty? “Christ set us free to the position of freedom; stand firm, therefore, and be not entangled again with a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1—translation). True liberty is neither legalistic nor does it give license. It frees one to slavery to Jesus Christ. One is the slave of either Christ or the Devil. The unregenerate are slaves of the Devil, and the way of the transgressor is hard. Those freed by Jesus Christ shall know the truth: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). There is a freedom without law; but true freedom is freedom in law, enslaved to Jesus Christ and His law.

The problem Paul was dealing with is stated in Romans 15:8. Jewish converts were still holding to some of their traditions. Paul was saying Christ has become (perfect passive infinitive of *ginomai*) a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises of the fathers. Therefore, both saved Jews and saved Gentiles must leave their scruples behind and be edified in the whole counsel of God. It is easier for the Gentile who has not been religious to leave his scruples than for a Jew who has been steeped in religious tradition to leave his scruples. Paul referred to Isaiah’s prophecy of the future (v. 12), when Jesus Christ shall reign as King, in order that he might encourage their hope in the future. “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in the sphere of believing, that you may abound in the sphere of hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13—translation). Paul concluded this section of Scripture with the hope of both weak and strong brothers in the coming kingdom when Jesus Christ shall reign over saved Jews and saved Gentiles.



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## NATURE OF THE ASSEMBLY

The invisible union with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in regeneration must precede the visible manifestation of that union in the local aspect of the assembly. As Jesus Christ was the invisible God, the assembly of Christ is appointed to be the image of the invisible Christ. We do not see Christ. God could be seen only through the incarnate Son, and Jesus Christ can be seen today only through the visible aspect of His assembly. The fact that we all observe Christ's assembly as a local organization must not mislead us to think that what we see is the only aspect of His body. Man has a part that no one can see, and the assembly has an invisible aspect. The invisible aspect of both man and the assembly is the principle of life existing in each.

The Savior's profound statement in one of the great doctrinal chapters of the Bible verifies that many members of Christ's assembly are not visible: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd, and I know my own, and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me, I also know the Father; and I lay

down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not from this sheepfold; it is necessary for me to bring them also, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:11, 14-16—translation). Among the chosen nation of Jews was an elect number. There were also “other sheep” who were not from among the Jews. Christ was referring to the Gentiles. The fact that Christ spoke of having (present tense) some who shall hear (future tense) proves that all the members of His flock are not visible on earth. All the members of Christ’s flock never have been visible on the earth at the same time. Almost 2,000 years after Jesus Christ spoke these words in John 10, many of His sheep have died; and they are with Him. Some are presently alive on earth; some have not yet been born physically; and some have been born physically who have not been born again.

Christ’s statement “I lay down my life for the sheep” proves that redemption is particular. Since the Persons in the Godhead are one in essence, purpose, and work, one must conclude that election, redemption, and regeneration are of equal extent. If redemption were universal, one would be forced to believe in universal election and universal regeneration. If redemption were universal, in order to be consistent, regeneration and the effectual call would have to be universal. Such reasoning is wicked. Christ did not conditionally purchase salvation, but He absolutely and perfectly purchased redemption for the sheep. If infinite love moved Jesus Christ to die for all men, why does the same love not move the Holy Spirit to regenerate all men?

The union of life and the consequent reciprocal knowledge of that life by the elect transcends the closest intimacies of man’s earthly existence. There is only one worthy description of that deep and mysterious oneness and our knowledge thereof. Therefore, Jesus Christ said, “I am the good Shep-

herd; and I know My own, and My own know Me” (John 10:14 NASB).

The elect person’s knowledge of his oneness with Christ shall cause him to manifest his union of life with Christ. Although the Holy Spirit of God in regeneration brings the elect of God into union with Christ on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary work, the redeemed too often disguise rather than manifest their true nature. Peter did not manifest his true nature when he rebuked Christ, denied his Lord and Savior, or acted hypocritically. However, he did not habitually continue in a life of sin: “Everyone continuing in Him is not sinning; everyone sinning has not seen Him nor has known Him. Little children, let no man lead you astray; the one practicing righteousness is righteous, just as that One is righteous. The one committing sin is of the Devil; because from the beginning the Devil has been sinning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He may bring to an end the works of the Devil. Everyone having been born out of God does not practice sin, because His seed is remaining in him; and he cannot be habitually sinning, since he has been born out of God” (I John 3:6-9—translation). The person who has been permanently born will not continue in sin. As Peter did not perfectly reflect the principle of grace within him, the local aspect of Christ’s assembly, which is made up of imperfect living stones, does not perfectly reflect her invisible life principle.

One cannot believe in the absolute sovereignty of God without embracing the invisible aspect of the *ekklesia*. For example, the 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost were added to the local assembly at Jerusalem. Hence, they were sovereignly called out before they were added to a geographic assembly—the assembly located in Jerusalem (Acts 2:37-47). Therefore, distinction between the invisible and visible aspects of Christ’s assembly is necessary to safe-

guard the fact that local assembly membership saves no one. The baptism of Simon Magus, the sorcerer, and his becoming a part of the assembly of the Samaritans in Samaria did not make his heart right in the sight of God (Acts 8). He was a member of the local assembly, but he was not a member of the assembly that Christ Jesus is building.

The heart that pleases God is the new heart which He Himself gives in regeneration. Old Testament writers used the terms “circumcised heart” (Deut. 30:6), “one heart” (Jer. 32:39), and “new heart” (Ezek. 36:25-27). The New Testament equivalents are “new creation” (II Cor. 5:17) and “new man” (Col. 3:10). The new heart is a new principle of life. It is a new light infused and a new will filled with a new purpose. This indicates a change in the whole character of man in his intelligence, affection, and will. Thus, grace first enters the heart before it is discovered in the life. Quickening grace opens the heart (Acts 16:14) to godly sorrow, and this issues in a repentance which never results in regret (II Cor. 7:10). This kind of repentance alone leads to a true salvation experience, which is equal to a conversion experience.

Repentance is an abiding principle of the new heart. There is an initial repentance, and then there is a continuing repentance. The heart by nature is impenitent, rebellious, hard, and calloused. It has a natural inclination to live in sin without shame or sorrow for offending God. The only shame or sorrow of one with an impenitent heart is when his sin is made public, and he is personally affected. However, the heart of the elect has been given by grace the abiding principle of repentance. This principle has the propensity, or disposition, to repent and mourn over sin, because the repentant person's God has been offended by His child's failure in his state before the world. Such sorrow leads the believer to turn from his sin to holiness of life, “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Practice must follow principle. Although the believer was passive when he was regenerated, he is made active by the presence of the indwelling Spirit of regeneration in his new heart. The Holy Spirit produces in the new creation a spirit of obedience and service. God said through Jeremiah, “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them” (Jer. 32:39). The one way is the way of Christ (John 14:6), and the one heart is the desire to follow Christ, which is fulfilled in the local aspect of the assembly.

The infusion of the principle of life into an elect person is instantaneous. But the change which begins in regeneration (II Cor. 5:17) keeps on changing for the better (Heb. 13:14-17) until the final change when we stand in the presence of Jesus Christ made like Him (I John 3:1-3). Although the regenerated man is a different (*heteros*) person, he is not another (*allos*) husband, father, or workman. As a man, he continues as before; nevertheless, he is a new creation in Christ Jesus. The members of His body before being made new by grace were the servants of sin. Subsequent to being made a new creation in Christ Jesus, his members have become the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:11-16). The difference is revealed in the verb tenses of Romans 6:1-15. Note the difference between the present active subjunctive of the verb *epimeno*, “shall we continue in a life of sin?” (v. 1), and the aorist active subjunctive of *hamartano*, “shall we commit acts of sin” (v. 15). A life of sin is absolutely impossible because the power of sin has been broken, a new nature has been implanted, and a new Master is now being served (vv. 2-14). The progressive future active indicative of the verb *dzaio* of verse 2, “We who died to sin, How shall we continue a life in it?” (translation), proves regeneration has made the believer an entirely different person. The change wrought in him will continue changing until the final change. He experiences change every day as he goes from strength to strength and from glory to glory.

The universal assembly that Jesus Christ began during His public ministry and is continuing to build until her completion has been, is, or shall be localized in the assemblies, which constitute the pillar and ground of the truth on earth. Immediately after Christ had spoken to the local assembly of the assembled disciples in Matthew 16 about the assembly He would continue to build, He gave instruction concerning discipline that must be exercised in local assemblies (Matt. 18:15-20).

Although the believer had nothing to do with either uniting himself with Christ or being baptized into His body at Pentecost, he does have something to do with placing himself in subjection to the delegated authority of a local assembly. Peter commanded the younger men to submit themselves (aorist passive imperative of *hupotasso*, which means to submit, obey, be under the authority of, or take a subordinate place) to those in authority (I Pet. 5:5).

Obedience is a Divine principle that must be observed. The following list shows that the proper order in obedience is submission—

1. To God (James 4:7).
2. To properly delegated authority (I Pet. 5:5).
3. To husbands by their wives (I Pet. 3:1).
4. To one another (I Pet. 5:5).
5. To masters by their servants (I Pet. 2:18).
6. To parents by their children (Eph. 6:1).
7. To higher authority (Rom. 13:1).

The work of Christ in building His assembly does not cease when the elect are called out to Himself. Those who have been effectually called have been given an affinity for the word of God and the people of God (Acts 2:41-47). A believer apart from a local assembly, which is a support and foundation of the truth, appointed by God—except for circumstances beyond his control in God’s providence—is a violation of God’s purpose for His people.

The importance of local assemblies is that they are ordained by God. Every born-again person is responsible to find an assembly of Christ where he can assemble for worship, study God’s word, take care of problems when they arise, and plan his service for the Lord. Serving follows assembling for worship. The order of worship, service, and warfare are taught in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The first two chapters magnify worship which includes teaching. Chapters three and four deal with work or service. Chapter five and especially chapter six emphasize warfare. One cannot worship without serving, because worship prepares and motivates the children of God for service; then, warfare always results from service. These three are inseparable in the life of the child of God.

Those who have worshipped have a threefold responsibility: (1) We continually look for the elect of God who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. (2) The undershepherd looks for those who are dedicated to the cause of Christ. Gideon had 32,000 at the beginning, but he could not go to war with them. Therefore, his number was reduced to 300 consecrated men. (3) We look for those who will fight the good fight of faith.

The Lord Jesus contrasted false and true worship in his encounter with the woman of Samaria (John 4:19-24). He reminded her that God is a spiritual Being, and the ones worshipping Him must be by the compulsion of God’s word

worship in the sphere of spirit and truth. The Lord Jesus redeemed a certain number by His death. The Holy Spirit goes to only that certain number and regenerates them. The Father seeks those the Son has redeemed and the Holy Spirit has quickened to worship Him in the sphere of spirit and truth.

Worship means reverence, honor, or adoration. Worship agrees with God who is worshipped. The more spiritual the worship, the less attractive it will be to the flesh. Worship is by man's spirit; therefore, we can only know and embrace with our spirits as worshippers that which is spirit. Our spirits are initially and continually renewed. One worships spiritually when the door of his heart is closed to all intruders and open only to the truth of God. When feelings, opinions, or traditions intervene, we do not worship. The Lord Jesus informed us to enter into our closets and close the door to pray. When the closet door is shut but the door of the heart is left open to roving thoughts, one does not pray.

Since God is Spirit, we must worship Him with our spirits in the sphere of His Spirit and truth. Apart from the sphere of Spirit and truth there is no worship. God is the infinite Spirit Being. One has correctly stated that God is excellent without any imperfection, Spirit without parts, great without quantity, perfect without quality, everywhere without place, powerful without members, and understanding without ignorance. We see only that which has form; however, it is no imperfection in our vision not to be able to see what was never made to see. Therefore, God, the Spirit Being, is known only through the incarnation (John 1:1, 14, 18). The incarnate One has declared the Father. Although the infinite spiritual Being has manifested Himself in the burning bush, the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, as a man in the fiery furnace, as the angel of the covenant, etc., the greatest manifestation is in the hypostatic union (Phil. 2:5-10).



Service has its place, but not the primary place. The Lord Jesus rebuked Martha for not giving worship preeminence in her life (Luke 10:38-42). Mary was so consumed with what she was hearing that she had no problem shutting out everything else. “But Martha was distracted [imperfect passive indicative of *perispao*] about much serving; and having come [aorist active participle of *ephistemi*] to Him, she said, Lord, is it of no concern [present active indicative of *melei*] to you that my sister left me alone to serve? Tell [*eipon*, aorist active imperative of *lego*] her therefore at once, that she may help me” (Luke 10:40—translation). Martha was so engrossed with service that she failed to worship, and she commanded the Lord Jesus to tell her worshipping sister to assist her in service. Christ commanded her attention by repeating her name twice to tell her Mary chose the good part which would not be taken from her. There is no true service without worship, and service results in warfare.



# 10

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## THE ASSEMBLY CONTINUING TO BE BUILT

Jesus Christ revealed the assembly He shall continue to build in preparation for the future kingdom: “And I am also saying to you, you are Peter [*Petros*, masculine], and upon this rock [*petra*, feminine] I shall continue to build [progressive future active indicative of *oikodomeo*] my assembly [feminine]; and the gates of *hades* shall not overpower her [feminine]. 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 [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 [perfect passive participle of *luo*] in the heavens” (Matt. 16:18, 19—translation).

In addition to the Father’s making known Jesus Christ His Son to Peter, the Lord Jesus Christ made known His work to him. He introduced His work in Matthew 16:18—“And I am also [*kago*] saying to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I shall continue to build my assembly...” (translation). The

Greek word *kago* is contracted from *kai*, a coordinating conjunction, and *ego*, a first person pronoun. It can be translated I also, I as well, I likewise, I in like manner, I in turn, I for myself, or for my part, I. Jesus Christ also had something to say. He placed Himself on equality with God the Father: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). This word, *kago*, is used in the following Scripture references: “...My Father worketh hitherto, and I also [*kago*] work” (John 5:17). “As the Father loved me, so I also [*kago*] love you...” (John 15:9—translation). “As you sent me into the world, I also [*kago*] sent them into the world” (John 17:18—translation). Hence, Jesus Christ affirmed His equality with the Father as He introduced the assembly which He is continuing to build.

When the Lord said, “you are Peter, and upon this rock I shall continue to build my assembly,” He was not emphasizing Peter over against Himself. The Father had made known to Peter who Jesus Christ is by giving him spiritual discernment to recognize the Person of Jesus Christ. After Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16—translation), Jesus Christ made known to Peter the assembly He shall continue to build.

Entering into a New Testament study of Christ’s assembly and His kingdom, one has no problem relating with Bible students who say we always pursue the study of the Scriptures with a certain kind of fear, even though there are innumerable blessings in the pursuit. This certain kind of fear results from more truth being made known and the realization that the greater the light the greater our responsibility to present truth without misrepresentation. This pure and living stream is not corrupted until it passes through the minds and lips of God’s servants who try to interpret what He originally gave. The truth which flows through the channel is infinite; but after passing through finite channels, it does not come out in the same pure form as it was originally given. Servants have

limited understanding, and they must also battle personal opinions. Servants today do not speak “by” but “from” inspiration.

Paul did not make impure by admixture the pure wine of Divine truth when he gave the Corinthian letter: “...we are not as the many, who are peddling the word of God...” (II Cor. 2:17). The Greek word for corrupt is a present active participle of *kapeleuo*, which means to huckster (peddle for profit), to corrupt or adulterate. Paul was not like many who were peddling the word of God for profit. He proclaimed what he received. Although God’s ministers cannot handle the unadulterated word without misrepresenting it, to some degree, they do not peddle the Scriptures for profit. They handle them with reverential fear.

In the midst of all the “winds of doctrine” blowing today, a sincere desire and diligent study of Scripture is necessary in order to recognize God’s assembly which He is continuing to build and prepare for the eschatological kingdom. Therefore, one must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit and be taught exclusively by the Holy Scriptures, which results in his rejecting man-made traditions, opinions, and dogmas. Then, he is sure to encounter opposition. He becomes an outcast when he rejects some teaching of an established religious denomination. Furthermore, if he embraces things which are Scriptural from some established denominations, he will be criticized by all of them because he does not conform to any of them. He therefore becomes an enemy to all of them, but he pleases God, seeing that he seeks to conform to only objective truth.

Controversy, unlike common opinion concerning it, is not initially bad. The motive behind it makes it unfavorable. Controversy alone issues in complete failure, because neither party is convinced. Each attempts to prove himself right and

the other wrong. Therefore, both come out of the debate believing the same things they did before entering their discussion. The Christian is in error to enter into anything that is worthless; therefore, he must test everything and approve of that which has met the test: "Prove [*dokimadzete*, present active imperative of *dokimadzo*, which means to prove by trial or to test] all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21). However, testing the truth is insufficient without embracing and maintaining that which has been approved.

Polemics is that branch of theology dealing with controversy. Without a self-evident principle to determine what is truth, controversy could be endless. Since the Scriptures are our only standard, anything not found in them cannot be proved by them. In regard to religious questions, everything affirmed must be proved by Biblical evidence before it can be received and retained. No religious institution has authority from its age, seeming success, or tradition.

The burden of proof always lies on the affirmative side of the religious question. An affirmation is no authority without proof. In other words, without proof the affirmation is the same as though it had never been affirmed. One who seeks to disprove an affirmation where no Biblical evidence has been given is trying to disprove what has not been proved. That which has no proof needs no refutation. On the other hand, if a person is constrained to prove his religious affirmation, the objector is responsible to prove his objection. Hence, every person must seek to prove that which his cause requires. There is a well-known principle of law which states that every man is to be presumed free from wrong until his guilt is established. However, this does not mean that we are to take for granted that he is guiltless. If that were the case, there would be no need for a trial, and the alleged guilty person would be entitled to immediate liberation. No judgment should be pronounced prior to the revelation of all available evidence.

Therefore, the accuser must prove his side of the case, or the charge falls for lack of evidence. This same principle applies when one accuses another of believing something that is unscriptural.

Since our studies are not in the form of a public debate, the author takes the position of an objector to most of the interpretations he hears and reads on Matthew 16:18-19. Hence, he is responsible as an objector to show, by giving Biblical evidence to support his propositions, why he believes these interpretations are false. Therefore, it becomes necessary to look carefully into the Greek text by parsing some of the important words in these verses. The word “parse” means to describe a word or a series of words grammatically, telling the part of speech, inflectional form, and syntactic relation. Nothing in this study will be dull or annoyingly repetitious to the sheep of Christ, because they have a desire to know the truth.

The Gospel according to Matthew is a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The writer of Hebrews said, “GOD, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...” (Heb. 1:1, 2 NASB). Beginning with the New Testament, God no longer spoke through His servants, but He Himself spoke directly. The eternal Son in His amazing condescension took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). He, who is high above all nations and whose glory is above the heavens, came to earth in the form of a servant to give His own personal message and to give Himself for His people.

The trite saying that the Old Testament is revealed in the New can be illustrated in the following ways: (1) The state of the Old Testament saints is explained by “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (I

Cor. 2:9). (2) The communication of the things God has prepared for those who love Him is attested by inspiration to New Testament writers: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost [Spirit] teacheth..." (I Cor. 2:13). (3) The character of the message and of the persons who are capable of understanding what has been given is represented by, "they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14).

The theme of the New Testament is Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hopes and promises and His building His assembly, which is also a vital part of His purpose for the future kingdom. Therefore, the following things are true: (1) The King of the kingdom was promised in the Old Testament. (2) His birth, rejection, death, and assembly are revealed in the Gospels. (3) The King is viewed sitting on the throne of His Father as Head of the assembly in the Epistles. (4) The King is manifested to the world in all His power and glory with His assembly and Israel in Revelation, at which time He will sit on His throne (Rev. 3:21).

The Hebrew Epistle speaks of two ages, both of which refer to God's dealings with Israel. One ended at the cross: "For otherwise He had to suffer often from the foundation of the world; but now once at the completion of the ages He has been manifested [perfect passive indicative of *phaneroo*] for the removal of sin through the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26—translation). The cross ended God's dealings with Israel under the Levitical system. Scripture reveals that Israel shall yet be God's people in a coming day: "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come..." (Heb. 2:5). "The world to come" literally signifies the coming inhabited earth.

The present is the age of the New Testament assembly. The kingdom of God is future. Hence, the kingdom of Christ will be different from Christ's control as Head of His assembly,



which He is building, and His sovereign providential rule over the universe. If Christ were presently reigning as King, His reign would be visible. Every eye shall see Him when He reigns as King. His headship in His assembly and His action in providence are both invisible. He works mediately in local assemblies and in providence, but His rule in the kingdom will be direct and immediate. The world at large does not know that the Lord Jesus is reigning in either providence or as Head in His assemblies.

Confusion on the three aspects of our Lord's rule—in providence, His assembly, and His kingdom—leads to serious consequences: (1) It makes the present age the period of the kingdom. (2) It indicates that Christ's assembly in her present, imperfect state is performing functions which can be fulfilled only when the body of Christ is perfected. (3) It dissolves the divinely covenanted purpose in the nation of Israel. (4) It makes the present age of Christ's assembly the final period of human history. (5) It seats fallible and mortal men on the throne with the risen and glorified Lord.

The object of Christ's assembly is not to "christianize" the world but to be the means of calling out of the world those the Holy Spirit regenerates, that we may reign with Christ in the kingdom (Matt. 5:5; Luke 12:32; 22:28-30; I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 1:6). The Christian hope, therefore, is not to reign in this present world but to reign with Christ when He comes the second time.

When He spoke to the disciples, Christ addressed an assembly—called-out ones—in a geographical setting, Caesarea Philippi, about the assembly that He shall build. The *ekklesia* Christ is building includes all the called-out ones constituting the bride of Christ. This *ekklesia* will not be made up of an aggregation of local assemblies, denominations, sects, and cults. She will consist of a collection of the elect,

who have been called out from among Jews and Gentiles, who were appointed to be the bride of Jesus Christ. Thus, the assembly is represented as being the “body,” “building,” and “bride” of Christ. She is also depicted as a “dwelling-place [*katoiketerion*] of God by the agency of the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22—translation) of which Jesus Christ is the foundation (I Cor. 3:11), chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:14-22; I Pet. 2:4-6), builder (Matt. 16:18), and head (Eph. 5:22-32; Col. 1:18).

What one believes is intensely personal, but the Christian life is not a private matter. The Christian life has a twofold character. It is lived out personally and with other believers. From the first moments of our Christian experience, there was an inward urge for the company of like-minded believers. Mutual action and reaction as well as reciprocal giving and receiving are required. Although God created man as an individual, He did not leave him isolated. Likewise, when God by the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect, they welcome the word of God, are baptized, are added to a local assembly, and continue steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:41, 42).

Assembly meetings give direction to the private spiritual lives of believers and guidance for the correct observance of our corporate life. Hence, believers cannot talk about the authority of Scripture for our personal lives and ignore what Scripture says about assembly life.

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## MYSTERY OF THE ASSEMBLY

The two things in this world that God values more than all others combined are His assembly and His objective truth, which has been once committed to His saints. The Truth—Jesus Christ—is the foundation of the assembly; therefore, the assembly is the support and foundation of the Truth. Paul spoke of the assembly with high and lofty expressions in I Timothy 3:15. Following the list of qualifications for officers of the assembly, Timothy was told how (*pos*, an interrogative adverb) to behave (present passive infinitive of *anastrepho*, to be occupied or conduct oneself according to the principles of God's household) himself in the family (*oikos*) of God, which is the *ekklesia* of the living God.

Christians acknowledge the work of God in creation and redemption, and they embrace the fact that progressive sanctification is wrought in them through the local assemblies. This is clearly understood by the assembly being the support and foundation of the truth, and truth being the means of practical sanctification (John 17:17; I Thess. 4:1-8; 5:14-23). Since truth has been entrusted to the assembly, faithful men

are the only persons to handle God's truth in the assembly meetings (II Tim. 2:2). Men of ordinary gifts are given to local assemblies for the edification of believers (Eph. 4:11-16), but men with these qualifications are to be recognized by the assemblies before they are appointed to the awesome responsibility of publicly proclaiming God's word (I Tim. 3:1-7). The purpose of Paul's fatherly advice to his son in the faith is revealed in I Timothy 3:14-16.

Paul went from discussing the nature of Christ's assembly to considering the nature of Christ Himself. The mystery of godliness compliments the mystery of the assembly (Eph. 5:32). As the incarnation is both a manifestation and a mystery, the birth of the assembly is also both a manifestation and a mystery. As the incarnate Christ is the only visible manifestation of God, the local assembly is the only visible manifestation of the invisible principle of life. To make the visible assembly the only aspect of the assembly Christ is building is the same as saying Jesus Christ is nothing more than man. Conversely, to make the assembly only invisible is the same principle as merging Christ's human nature into His Divine nature.

Both Jesus Christ and His assembly are manifested, while at the same time they are mysteries. Concerning Christ, Paul said, "And by common confession [*omologoumenos*, an adverb meaning undeniably, avowedly, confessedly, or without controversy] great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory" (I Tim. 3:16 NASB). It is wonderful to see how Paul transcended from the lower to the higher—from Christ's human nature to His Divine nature, from the nations of the world to the angels of heaven, and from the world to glory.

A work of grace in the hearts of men is required to enable them to see beneath the human nature of the Son of Man and behold the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:6). Believers do not stop with the visible humanity of Christ, but they affectionately embrace the God-man and exclaim, “My Lord, and my God.”

Concerning the assembly, Paul said, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church [assembly]” (Eph. 5:32). Although the assembly Christ is building is visibly manifested, she remains a mystery to the world. The gospel has been committed to weak and despised persons (I Cor. 1:26-31). Like Christ, the assembly has no beauty to make either worldly-minded men or religionists desire her (Mark 13:13; John 15:18; Acts 8:1-4). A work of grace is absolutely necessary to enable men to look beneath the earthen vessel and esteem the work of the invisible Holy Spirit who has made the sheep a part of the assembly Christ is building.

The mystery of godliness enables Christians to better understand the heavenly treasure committed to an earthen vessel—the local assembly. As sight of the physical eye is necessary to behold the revelation of God in creation, the spiritual eye is essential to see the application of the redemptive work of Christ in the new creation (Rom. 1:19, 20; II Cor. 5:17). Heavenly truth is committed to the local assembly, and spiritual eyesight is indispensable to discern the presence of God in her. The world does not recognize God’s presence in the assembly any more than a blind man discerns the beauty of nature.

The mystery of godliness is a great mystery under the seal of public confession. Although the mystery of godliness is now revealed, it remains a mystery because we cannot by searching fully comprehend it. It is a mystery for the following reasons:

1. Christ was a mystery until God chose to reveal this second (second only to the mystery of the Trinity) greatest of all mysteries. God, knowing that man would fall, devised a plan for elected fallen men to be saved by the death of His Son, who was foreordained before the foundation of the world. This was the only way God could be just in justifying the unjust and justice not be overthrown in that justification (Rom. 3:24-26).

2. Christ is a mystery because when He is revealed, the elect alone are able to embrace Him (John 10; 17; I Cor. 2:1-10). The mystery of Christ was revealed to the Jews by being wrapped in ceremonies, symbols, shadows, and types; but the prophesied Lamb of God was hidden from the other peoples of the world. When the Word entered a new mode of existence in His incarnation, the people of the world saw nothing more than a mere man. They failed to see the eternal Son who was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). The Son is not simply the only revealer of God, but He is God Himself revealed. While the eternal Son's Godhead was actually related to His manhood from all eternity, only at the incarnation did His manhood become actually related to His Godhead. Christians alone can comprehend such a mystery.

3. Christ is a mystery in regard to what we do not presently know but shall know when we see Him. Believers now see Jesus Christ by faith as He is presented in the mirror of Scripture, the objective truth. However, the hope of the assembly is to see Him face to face. She is not only saved in hope, but the hope in which she is saved is her anchor (I John 3:2-3; Rom. 8:24; Heb. 6:18-20).

Like the mystery of godliness, the assembly is a mystery (Eph. 5:32). Jesus Christ is a great mystery because of His two natures—Divine and human. His body, the assembly, is also a mystery because of her invisible and visible aspects.

Although the assembly is visibly manifested, she is not absolutely visible. Her visibility is only a revelation that directs us to something greater than what is made visible. However, the invisible and Spirit-born nature has a visibility in the world. It is a fact that Christians are already positionally what they are conditionally becoming, and they are conditionally becoming what they really are positionally. Thus, the assembly is a mystery for the following reasons:

1. The assembly was a mystery until Christ chose to reveal her (John 10:16; Eph. 2:11-3:12; 5:32). From the fall to the flood, God manifested Himself in no particular place. After the flood, the first altar was erected by Noah (Gen. 8:18-22). Some great truths are typically set forth in the altar and the offerings. The altar denotes worship which is the prerequisite to service. Abraham and Isaac built their altars (Gen. 22:9; 26:25), but not until the time of Jacob do we find the expression, "house of God" (Gen. 28:10-22). God had a place of testimony at Bethel, and later He had a place of worship in the tabernacle (Deut. 12). The Israelites are viewed as characterizing certain localities, "...every one unto his city" (Ezra 2:1). This typifies "...all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (I Cor. 1:2). Thus, the body of Christ, like Israel, is found assembling in various parts of the world. A Christian apart from a particular assembly of corporate fellowship is foreign to Scripture. The assembly, Christ's body or bride, was not an afterthought with God (Eph. 1:4-6; II Tim. 1:9-12). With the incarnation of the Bridegroom came the unveiling of His bride which would be made up of both Jews and Gentiles from among the elect of God. Although the mystery has been revealed, there are many things about it that remain a mystery. Why do some and not all of the elect constitute the bride? That would be the same as asking, why did Christ choose some and not others to be apostles?

2. The assembly Christ is building is a mystery. She is in the world, but not of it. She has life, but it is a hidden life: “IF ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1-3). Christians are a strange kind of people—poor, yet rich; living, yet dying; and glorious, yet despised. This is the state of the assembly in the world. One should never approach the things of God with his own reasoning, because he cannot draw from such depths with the bucket of his own understanding. God’s mysteries must be unveiled by God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, knowing that the things of God are mysteries is no reason for the believer to despair. The excellency of the Teacher, not the ability of the student, unveils spiritual things to the elect (I Cor. 2:6-10; I John 2:20). Furthermore, the Divine Teacher has an advantage over all teachers; He not only teaches, but He also gives understanding (Luke 24:45).

3. The assembly is a mystery in regard to the truth that she is not now what she shall be. She is being progressively sanctified in preparation for her wedding and kingdom reign with Jesus Christ, her Bridegroom, Head, and King. It does not yet appear what she shall be; but she shall surely be like Christ (I John 3:2); at which time, she will be without spot (*spilos*, blemish or stain) or wrinkle (*rutis*, flaw or blemish) (Eph. 5:27). Whatever remains of our sanctification or preparation for that time will be taken care of when Christ comes for His bride.



# 12

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## INDIVIDUAL AND CORPORATE RELATIONSHIPS

If the visible assembly alone were the absolutely true assembly of Christ, any organizational deviation from the Scriptural standard would be a breach of unity. Failure to distinguish between unity of position and unity of condition is serious. The conditional unity is something for which each local assembly strives but cannot achieve until she stands in the presence of Christ. The local assembly, like the believers who constitute her, is imperfect. Therefore, one who says the local assembly is the only aspect of Christ's assembly is saying the conditional life of her members is the only aspect of their "Christianity." That would be a denial of their legal and positional standing before God.

The visible institutional feature of Christ's assembly is not the only aspect of the assembly Jesus Christ is continuing to build. If it were, the only hope for divided Christendom would be to work for a religiously oriented world assembly. False teachers are diligently working under the leadership of Satan to accomplish that very thing. This idea is not new; it goes back to the tower of Babel (Gen. 10; 11). Is not the Babel

spirit, the spirit of self-exaltation which grew to such an alarming height in Babel, becoming more and more the spirit of the day? This spirit will eventuate in three things: (1) World education will ultimately involve not only an attitude toward false religions but also the suppression of one's own deep convictions. (2) World government will ultimately promote an attitude of peace, peace, when there is no peace. (3) World religion will become a reality at the time of universal restlessness. Therefore, three basic things are represented by the tower of Babel—the purpose was unity; the program was united effort; and the principle was human glory.

The crucial conflict is between discriminatory individualism by a sovereign God and coercive collectivism imposed upon the religious community by false teachers. Hence, the struggle is between two opposing sets of principles: (1) the absolute sovereignty of God in creation, providence, and redemption; and (2) a set of humanly devised policies to establish “heaven on earth.” These humanly devised policies change with expediency. Abundant evidence of change is in the religious community of our day. The final goal of these depraved policies will be consummated in a religious system that shall join hands with the coming antichrist (Rev. 17; 18).

The proper view of the visible aspect of the assembly is not to try to make unity by humanly devised means. That is the theory of the Roman Catholic Church and many noncatholic assemblies. Believers recognize the unity of the Spirit that already exists in them (Eph. 4:3), and that Spirit gives visible expression of that unity in the local assembly. As no earthly central authority ruled over the assemblies of the New Testament, no amalgamation of local assemblies into one large earthly institution is to be sought. All that is essential to the foundation of unity must be found by each local assembly in every age. Christians know that unity is found only in truth and never at its expense. The three important ingredients in

Biblical unity are (1) doctrine, (2) spiritually understood doctrine, and (3) practical experience of doctrine. Not one of these ingredients can be missing in true unity. Many have a mental concept of doctrine; others may have a human understanding of doctrine to some degree; but only the persons who have known and experienced doctrine can speak authoritatively about unity. Therefore, fellowship does not precede doctrine, but it is the result of knowing and experiencing doctrine: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The Christian life has a twofold character resulting from two relationships—one with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit and one with fellow believers. Individual and corporate relationships are taught in I Corinthians 12:12 and 27—“For even as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.... And you Christ’s body, and members individually” (translation).

Personal relationship with God is manifested by corporate relationship with fellow believers. Faith, which is the gift of God, is directed to particular persons; but this faith is never restricted to the extent that it has nothing to do with public worship and fellowship. First century Christians sought out fellow believers because of the commonality of salvation (Jude 3). Like attracting like operates in all departments of life—social, intellectual, political, and spiritual. If professing Christians possess a stronger attraction for either the social, intellectual, or political than for the spiritual, they should soberly evaluate their spirituality.

Christians have both the subjective light of the Holy Spirit and the objective light of revealed truth. Despite all the religious confusion today, Christians need not grope in the

darkness of ignorance. With privilege comes responsibility. Believers are commanded to examine all things and hold fast the good (I Thess. 5:21). Such examination is not made by the examiner's standard but by God's standard (Is. 8:20). The place where believers are to have corporate fellowship is where the subjective Spirit and objective truth harmonize.

There are individual members in the body of Christ: "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12:27 NASB). The individual members vary in their appointed tasks. As there are many members in the human body (Ps. 139:13-16), there are many members in the body of Christ. As the human body was not hidden from God (Ps. 139:15), the body of Christ was known eternally to God (II Tim. 1:9, 10). These several parts of Christ's body are taken from among men by the Father's electing grace, the Son's redeeming blood, and the Spirit's regenerating work. This is discrimination. God not only visited the sheepfold of Judaism and took some out, but He also took some out of the nations (John 10:1-16; Acts 15:14). God will continue taking out some until the body of Christ is complete. If discrimination is morally wrong, then God is wrong in His electing love. Most religionists give lip service to the Biblical statement that salvation is of God (Jonah 2:9; John 1:13), but the application of this truth arouses hatred in depraved hearts (Luke 4:25-29). A sermon on general grace is tolerated anywhere; however, a message on particular grace changes tolerance into hatred.

The individual members of Christ's assembly vary in their appointed functions. When believers understand that each member has been chosen and placed in the body of Christ according to God's will, there is no place for either an envious or a superior spirit. Hence, no member should covet what seems to be a more important place in the body. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (I Cor. 12:15). The foot has a

work to do which the hand cannot perform.

How wonderful to find many members but only one body. The word “body” in reference to either the local or invisible aspect of the assembly is always singular. How encouraging to learn that in I Corinthians 12:28, “helps” (accusative plural of *antilemphis*, which means ability to help or assist) are as important in their places as the apostles, prophets, and teachers are in theirs. All could not be those “seemingly” exalted ones, but all are among the “excellent” ones by being chosen as members of Christ’s body. Each believer is important in the position where God has placed him whether he is a foot, a hand, an ear, an eye, a nose, etc. Each member should be satisfied with his own station in the body, because he has been placed there by the sovereign God: “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (I Cor. 12:18).

There is corporate life in the body of Christ: “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (I Cor. 12:20). In the diversified function of individual members of the body, they are mutually dependent on the Head as they keep their individual stations of service with a common goal. The same principle of operation that links the various members of the human body applies to local assemblies: “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (I Cor. 12:26). Achan’s sin involved the whole nation of Israel (Josh. 7), and fornication in Corinth affected the whole assembly (I Cor. 5). Therefore, as sand in the eye, an abscessed tooth, or a broken foot causes instant cessation of life’s enjoyment, division of doctrine, breach of fellowship, or divided interest causes a division in the assembly (I Cor. 12:25). The testimony of the whole body is threatened by a disobedient and sinful member who is not disciplined. On the other hand, when one member is honored, all the members rejoice with him rather than being

envious of him (I Cor. 12:26).

Although corporate life in the local assembly is a blessed reality, it will never be what Christians strive for as their goal. Paul was cognizant that perfection will never be reached in time; nevertheless, he used a continuous present tense of the Greek verb *dioko* when he said, “I am striving toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Thus, Paul was becoming conditionally what he was positionally because he already was legally and positionally what he was becoming—progressively sanctified. Some religionists emphasize position and ignore condition, and others stress condition and minimize position. Both are incorrect. Those positionally in Jesus Christ will manifest it conditionally.

# 13

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## THE ASSEMBLY A LIVING EPISTLE

The assembly of Christ has two aspects—invisible and visible, but she is not an indistinct body. As there is a visible aspect of every Christian, the assembly of Christ is visibly manifested. The two aspects of invisibility and visibility are characteristic of every Christian. Paul told the assembly at Corinth that she was an epistle read and known by all men: “Do we begin again to be commending [present active infinitive of *sunistemi*] ourselves; or do we, as some, need commendatory letters to you or from you? You are our letter which has been written [perfect passive participle of *eggrapho*] in our hearts, being known and read by all men; Being made plain that you are a letter of Christ having been ministered by us, not having been inscribed with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets, but on tablets of human hearts. And we are having such confidence through Christ toward God. Not that we are capable of ourselves to evaluate [aorist middle infinitive of *logidzomai*, which means consider, evaluate, or suppose] anything as out of ourselves, but our capability is out of God, Who also made us capable ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit:

for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive” (II Cor. 3:1-6—translation). Three cognate Greek words are used in verses 5 and 6: (1) the adjective *hikanos*, capable; (2) the noun *hikanotes*, capability; and (3) the verb *hikanoo*, to make capable.

Paul spoke to the Corinthians of two aspects of the assembly: (1) That which was written by the Spirit in their hearts was invisible. (2) That which was written in their hearts being “known and read by all men” was visible. Believers know that capability is of God, but this is not the same as being assured that God is capable. Declaring that God is capable is like saying “the invisible God is God.” The truth that capability is of God is visibly manifested by those who acknowledge by their manner of life that they trust and follow God, suffer for Him, and lean on His competency.

Paul began the third chapter of his second letter to the Corinthians with a question, “DO we begin again to be commending ourselves?” He was not writing a letter of self-praise; furthermore, he was a God-called apostle who did not use testimonial letters from other apostles or believers for his own personal advantage. He knew that false teachers at Corinth were using letters for malicious purposes, because he had been guilty of doing the same thing in his unregenerate state: “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1, 2). Now, as a true servant of God, the apostle was willing to let the Corinthian Christians be his letter (*epistole*, letter or epistle—I Cor. 3:2) of commendation.

Christ’s assembly at Corinth is represented by a commendatory letter which shall be considered under three headings:



(1) The Corinthian believers constituted a living letter permanently recorded in the hearts of the apostles. Therefore, the apostles did not need to give a letter of commendation to the assembly or receive one from her. (2) The living letter of the Corinthians was being known and manifested by all. (3) The living letter was permanently written in the hearts of the Corinthians by the Spirit of the living God. At this point, the figure goes from the hearts of the apostles to the hearts of the Corinthians.

The living Corinthian letter was the product of God through the ministry of the apostles. While false teachers in Corinth were showing their credentials, as Paul had done before he was Divinely saved and called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and Him crucified, the apostles had the work of grace in the lives of the Corinthians as their authority. Hence, they needed no letter written with ink to commend them. The message which had first been spoken by Christ was being preached by the apostles: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following...” (Mark 16:20).

Letters of commendation from denominations, institutional “churches,” or the “clergy” have as much value in the eyes of the Lord as the letters Paul requested from the high priest to the synagogues in Damascus. Adulterating, job hunting, huckstering, and self-serving “clergymen” can get letters of commendation if they have enough charisma and support certain denominations. Paul said that he, unlike many, was not guilty of “hawking” (present active participle of *kapeleuo*, to peddle the word of God for profit) the word of God (II Cor. 2:17). Therefore, the man of God, unlike false teachers, does not rely on letters of commendation, which any religionist can write. The apostle appealed to the Corinthian believers as his living letter. They constituted the best evidence of his zeal, steadfastness in the faith, and success. Paul had proved by his

life that he was not in the ministry for money or an easy life (I Cor. 9; II Cor. 11:16-33). He was Divinely called to the ministry (Gal. 1:13-17), and he manifested that call by his love for the people of God and the elect who had not yet been called (II Tim. 2:8-10).

Paul's principle for testing what was the fruit of the Spirit had no resemblance to the standard used by religionists today. The apostle did not talk about or submit an annual report on increases or decreases in baptisms. Since when are baptisms equivalent to the salvation of persons by grace? Those making decisions are not the same as individuals passing from death to life by the quickening Spirit. Religionists' "winning souls" cannot be equated with the work of the sovereign Spirit in regenerating the elect. The use of mob psychology by preachers to persuade people to repeat after them the so-called "sinner's prayer" is not synonymous with the effectual call by the Spirit of God. Only those who have a Biblical understanding of the science of salvation can make these proper distinctions. Hence, men who have the Biblical concept of salvation are not peddling the word of God for either personal or denominational profit. They faithfully declare the whole counsel of God with full understanding that God alone gives the increase without human gimmicks, tricks, and manipulations.

The hawkers of Jesus Christ do not understand election by God the Father, mediation by Jesus Christ, or quickening by the Holy Spirit. Many peddlers of Jesus Christ are scholarly, eloquent, and popular; but in the sight of God, they are failures because they have gone "a-whoring" (Ex. 34:15) after denominational recognition for personal gain. The first servants of Christ and the servants of men today vastly differ. Servants of men are always dreaming up some new gimmick or man-made program to peddle their messages, but the early disciples succeeded in their service because their capability was from God rather than their being influenced by the will of

man. The Corinthian letter had been permanently inscribed (perfect passive participle of *eggrapho*, to write, inscribe, or record) on the hearts of the apostles (II Cor. 3:2).

The living epistle at Corinth was not only being known and read by all men, but it was also being manifested as the product of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 3:2, 3). Since no epistle is self-produced, it must have an author. Therefore, the Corinthian epistle was the epistle of Jesus Christ. Grace written in the heart is Christianity. Many books have been written on the evidence of Christianity; but when the Holy Spirit inscribes grace in the hearts of the elect, God has produced living epistles against which no argument by Satan can be validated. Christians are the transcript of Christ's purpose, and what the Holy Spirit has written stands written. It remains efficacious because it is the fruit of God's choice and the Son's redemption. Furthermore, it continues valid because that which God has begun (aorist middle participle of *en-archomai*) in the elect He will also complete (progressive future active indicative of *epiteleo*, will keep on completing or perfecting) until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

The living epistle at Corinth was a means of communication. This is the purpose of a letter. A principle that must not be overlooked in such communication is that the letter must be communicated as it is without change. Who has the authority to change the letter inscribed in the hearts of the elect? When the letters of men are illegible, the fault is with their authors. However, when the letters of Christ are indiscernible, the fault is not with Jesus Christ. The fault with the Corinthian letter was with the Corinthians themselves. Failure to cleanse themselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit was the cause of the indistinctness of the Corinthian epistle (II Cor. 7:1). The same is true with every living epistle of Jesus Christ.

There are many copies of the Bible in the world, but there

is only one original. None of the copies is a perfect manifestation of the original manuscript. Likewise, there are many living epistles, but there has never been nor will there ever be a perfect demonstration in this world of what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the tablets of the hearts of the regenerate. A study of the assembly Epistles will demonstrate to the student that the condition of assemblies never measures up to their standing before God. Therefore, the message of every living epistle is distorted by the earthen vessel through which the message is manifested before men. This, however, does not lessen the responsibility of manifesting the truth of the letter as it was originally written.

The imperfect manifestation of the original message recorded in the tablets of the hearts of Christians, plus the imperfect knowledge and discernment of what is read, compounds the problem. However, it is a marvel of God's love and power that regardless of the problem, His grace is seen in the salvation of the elect. In Acts 11:18-24, we are told that God granted repentance to the Gentiles, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. When the assembly at Jerusalem heard about what had happened to the Gentiles, Barnabas was sent to Antioch, and "...when he came, and had seen [aorist active participle of *horao*] the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave [*prosmenein*, present active infinitive of *prosmeno*, which means to be true to the Lord] unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). How did Barnabas see the grace of God? Grace is seen the same way that one sees the epistle that has been written in the heart of the regenerate. Both are manifested by the Christian's walking worthy of the calling to which believers have been called (Eph. 4:1).

The invisible grace of God puts on visibility. Being the gift of God, grace is clearly known and seen by the things it does in the lives of the elect. As the principle of life cannot be seen

apart from the living person, the grace or letter written in the heart by the Spirit cannot be seen apart from Christ's assembly. The grace of Christ is visibly manifested in a local assembly of two or three gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20).

The living letter had been permanently written (perfect passive participle of *eggrapho*) in the hearts of the Corinthian saints. The teaching that gives professing believers room to boast that their own power, either whole or in part, brought them to salvation is not of God. The elect's being more spiritually alive is the effect of the power and grace of the sovereign God (Eph. 1:19; 2:8-10). God's letter of grace inscribed on the hearts of the elect has a threefold effect: (1) a new heart, (2) a new spirit, and (3) a new way of life: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26, 27). Although this passage has great prophetic significance, the outstanding truths are also applicable to the elect in every age.

The new heart signifies a change which God alone can perform in the whole inner being of man. The heart of stone is senseless and unyielding, but grace has reversed the character of the heart to make it sensitive and yielding to the things of God. Furthermore, the new Spirit is the inner principle which directs the activities of the new heart. The new way of life is the fruit of the former. Principle must precede practice, and practice always follows principle. Thus, the permanent principle works in the elect to produce a life of obedience and service.



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## **NONFAILURE IN THE ASSEMBLY BUT FAILURE IN THE ASSEMBLIES**

The title of this chapter requires definition. The assembly as an organism has not failed and cannot fail, but the assembly as an organization has failed, is failing, and will fail. God's purpose in the body of Christ has not been unsuccessful. His purpose cannot be thwarted by men. The organizational assembly has been unsuccessful in achieving the desired goal because of the imperfections of men. There have been many failures in the local aspect of the assembly. On the other hand, it must be emphatically denied that the universal aspect of the assembly has failed (Matt. 16:18). Although local organizations have failed, the will of the sovereign God working through His people within those organizations has not failed (Phil. 2:12, 13).

Sectarians have founded various claims upon the promise of Matthew 16:18—"...upon this rock I shall continue to build my assembly; and the gates of hades shall not overpower her" (translation). In the light of the context, the promise has no application to any visible assembly or religion in its denom-

inational or organizational aspects. The promise teaches the security of the assembly Christ is building and the ultimate triumph of the truth for which she stands. This is secured by the stability of Jesus Christ, her living Head. The assembly originated in God's purpose before the foundation of the world. She is called out from among the Jews and Gentiles in time; moreover, the body of Christ is predestinated to become conformed to the image of God's Son. (Study Eph. 1:3-6; 2:11-22; 5:25-27; Rom. 8:29, 30). Thus, the assembly is "from" heaven as to her election, taken out "from among" the peoples of the world in time as to her regeneration, and destined "for" heaven as to her eternal home. Only that which originated in eternity can survive to eternity.

The body of Christ is a vitalized organism. A living organism cannot be reduced to nothing more than a humanly organized society. To represent the body of Christ as a mere organization is to place her on a level with fraternal, racial, social, business, and military organizations. Human organizations are built into a system which would fall without the influences of outside powers. The body of Christ is distinct from all human organizations; it is operated from within by the Holy Spirit. This cannot be said of any organization which men build. The assembly is an organism because she is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16); she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:22); and she is a body in which her several members are in vital touch with Jesus Christ, her living Head (Eph. 4:15; 5:30; Col. 1:18).

The body of Christ is a centralized organism. Jesus Christ is "...head over all things to the church [assembly], Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22, 23). Unity among believers is secured by a centralized authority (Col. 1:18). It is not something formed by men, but it is that which is given in regeneration (Eph. 4:3). All believers are under the control of Jesus Christ. The solid basis for our



control is the deity, sonship, preexistence, incarnation, saviorhood, sinless life, and vicarious death of Jesus Christ (John 17:1-5). Christ's absolute control of His own is revealed in that He has manifested Himself to His own, represents them, and will perfect them (John 17:6-26).

The body of Christ is a functionized organism. The assigned business of the assembly is to manifest the living Christ. Visible assemblies are microcosms, small representations of the macrocosm—the universal assembly. They are the servants behind which the universal assembly is growing until all the elect are saved (John 6:37; 17:1-26; Heb. 2:9-11; II Pet. 3:9). Assemblies pass beyond the limits of their own individuality. They know instinctively that the principle of their being is the principle of the life of all local assemblies. Christianity in local assemblies is indestructible. It is built on the historical Christ, not on any idea or representation of Him. Therefore, it is built on the theological Christ, not the man-God but the God-man slain (I Pet. 1:18-20).

There is no doubt that many Christians have never reached the “higher ground” of Christian experience because they have not had a Paul to espouse them to one husband, Jesus Christ. It is imperative that every person who names the name of Jesus Christ should test his position, his surroundings, the activities he sanctions, and the teaching to which he listens and gives support. Satan is a master in the art of imitation. He has an imitation gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), an imitation assembly (Rev. 2:9), and imitation preachers (II Cor. 11:14, 15). The Bible does not leave us without due warning concerning the sad fact that many depart from the truth (Acts 20:28-30; I Tim. 4:1; II Tim. 3:1-5, 12, 13; II Pet. 2:1, 3, 17; I John 2:18-26; Jude 16-18).

Pharisaism is religious activity apart from the inward principle of life. Such danger attends every spiritual movement.

When Jesus Christ ceases to be preeminent, only a religious program remains; and it becomes the idol of the religionist. Any form of godliness which denies the power of grace must be rejected by the Christian. The religious activity of the day is not for the glory of God. Much of that which is called service is merely natural excitement of the flesh. Modern-day religion is competitive business. However, Jesus Christ is not for sale to anyone who will have Him. The apostles were not anxious for converts to call their own, but they were jealous for the glory and honor of God. They went forth in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, believing that God was honored by their declaring the whole counsel of God, whether or not men heard: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life..." (II Cor. 2:14-17).

One of two things holds together persons who profess faith in Christ. They are united by either truth or organization. Since we are living in a time of famine for the word of truth, the only adhesive force in professing Christendom is organization. Our age may be compared to the days of Amos. God said to the prophet, "...I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). During the present famine for the word of truth, professing Christendom is held together by the bigness and control of human organization. This organization is not limited to denominations. It is also used as a means of holding individual congregations together. Such organization is required to offer something appealing to depraved hearts and to retain them after they have been won to the organization. Winning one to some assembly program is considered by most religionists as winning him to Christ. The

local assembly program can be equated with Jesus Christ no more than the body of Christ can be equated with the local organizational assembly filled with “professors” rather than “possessors” of Christianity.

The great organizational trend is beginning to reach fruition in the end of this century. With circumstances moving so rapidly in our time, man is seeking refuge in various organizations. We have big government, big business, and big religion. Bigness is here to stay until it is destroyed by Jesus Christ at His second advent. Since it is here to stay until Christ’s coming, bigness warrants analysis and understanding. The question is often asked, Is this philosophy of “operation organization” suitable for the assembly?

Religious organizational machinery controls both the individual and the local assembly. There is a “great house” of organizational control in which there are vessels of both honor and dishonor (II Tim. 2:20-3:17). The great house is an organization. Individual and independent assembly authority has become denominational authority. Organization has become that part of the denominational leadership which is supported by local societies for administrative purposes. It disregards both the individual Christian and the local assembly. The early assemblies found their authority in the Bible, but today’s assemblies find their authority in the organizational structure of their denominations. Executives and committees expedite the affairs of assemblies. Failure to follow the organization is considered a sin against the work of God. Organization follows a pattern. A need for it is felt. Committees are appointed, and things which were done as a labor of love become payroll operation. Committees must be organized by electing chairmen of the various committees. Finally, there are so many committees that an executive is needed. An organization becomes a political machine. The executive chooses his friends as his assistants; then there is a power

struggle for top denominational jobs.

Organization demands conformity. It poses the problem of control. That which was organized to serve the assemblies becomes their controlling agency. This control is accomplished through the schools of higher learning. It is said that independent teachers and unique leaders may be the joy of individual Christians, but they are a menace to denominations. Pressure in favor of denominational unity comes from persons in the administrative organization.

While the great religious bodies are boasting of their position and progress with Laodicean complacency, spiritually minded believers are distressed by such apostasy. Nevertheless, they are not without hope. They trust the sovereign God who knows and controls all. Declension had set in during the days of the apostles (Acts 20:28-30; I John 2:18-26). There was no prospect of recovery (II Pet. 2:1-17). The position of the Christian now is similar to that of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, whose examples should be followed. They confessed their sins and judged themselves as having contributed to the awful state of God's people. Humiliation, self-judgment, and confession characterize God's people in any age. Christians are of like character with those of whom it is said, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD" (Zeph. 3:12). Every faithful Christian finds himself in a position of isolation in proportion to the measure of his fidelity to Christ.

The people of God have hope in the midst of declension (II Tim. 1:1-2:19). The believer's hope has a positive side: "...the Lord knoweth them that are his..." (II Tim. 2:19). The sovereign God has secured His objects of love. Grace has saved the objects of God's love and will keep them to the end. The apostasy of demons and men cannot thwart God's purpose. The believer's hope has a negative side: "...Let every one that

nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (II Tim. 2:19). To remain associated with iniquity is to deny the power of the gospel to deliver from iniquity. Human expediency and policy are unknown in the realm of saving faith. Divine principles can be carried out only in Divine power.

Local assemblies fail, like nationally organized Israel failed, but this does not indicate that God’s purpose is hindered. It only demonstrates that whatever men touch becomes contaminated. Imperfect men, though redeemed, mar everything they touch whether it is the priesthood, judgeship, kingship, or the local assembly. This awakens within saints the sense of responsibility to God. Members of an organized assembly are responsible not only to God but also in their relation to one another. Believers are to be so compact that their minds flow together and their wills merge, in order that their movements harmonize in every endeavor. When there is no light, there is no need for a candlestick; therefore, the candlestick is removed. However, the removal of the candlestick in a local place does not signify that the body of Christ has failed to accomplish its purpose. For instance, the present nonexistence of some of the local assemblies, such as Corinth, Ephesus, and Antioch, does not prove the failure of the universal aspect of the assembly. It only indicates that God’s purpose was accomplished in and through the elect at a particular time and place.



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## UNITY OF THE BODY

The unity of the body, which is a living organism and not an organization, is based on the unity of the Godhead. In origin and nature, its unity is of God. Therefore, it is not dependent on man. This unity is the result of the work of the sovereign Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Unity of the faith is its object (Eph. 4:13). Christians strive for the unity of the faith, not for the unity of the Spirit. Striving for the unity of the faith—the system of truth—is impossible without having been united in the Spirit. We guard the unity of the Spirit, and we strive for the unity of the faith through the gifts given to the body of Christ.

The assembly of Christ, the most important institution in the world, includes a twofold unity: (1) the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) and (2) the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13). The unity of the Spirit is positional. It is the result of regeneration. The early Christians were brought together on the basis of the only thing they had in common, their salvation in Jesus Christ (Jude 3). Their bond was the common (from *koinos*, belonging equally to several—Acts 2:44; 4:32; Jude 3) work of

regeneration by the Holy Spirit. There was no central government over early assemblies but only a local form of government imposed on the believers as they were brought together by the bond of a common salvation. This unity of the Spirit is something to be kept, not made, in the bond of peace. The word “endeavouring” of Ephesians 4:3 is not strong enough to explain the Greek present active participle of *spoudadzo*, meaning to be in earnest about, or spare no effort. The teaching is that believers are to spare no effort to keep (present active infinitive of *tereo*, to guard or keep watch over) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This unity is brought about by the Spirit, and we should spare no effort in guarding it with our lives.

A companion verse is recorded in Colossians 3:15—“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” This is a command to every Christian in the local assembly. Here, Paul called the assembly a body, not bodies, because all the members were viewed by God in eternity as a corporate entity. The word for “body” (*soma*) is used only in the singular, never in the plural. The Lord viewed the assembly as a whole. He did not say, “I pick you and you out in succession, in this generation and that generation.” Since God does not think successively, His viewing the body as a corporate entity was one act in eternity. In time, the elect are Divinely summoned by God. They are called to be in earnest about promoting unity in the bond of peace.

Persons who are not men of peace are not men of God, but this does not mean “peace at any price.” (See Heb. 12:14.) Temporary appeasement is possible in compromise, but it would not be expedient when a principle of God is at stake. We must remember that neither the center, foundation, nor instrument of unity is earthly. It will never be discovered in either human thought or organization. The foundation of



unity is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; the instrument is the Spirit's work in regeneration; and the center is the heavenlies in Christ. Such unity can be neither created nor destroyed by man, but Christians should make every effort to keep it in the bond of peace.

The unity of comprehensiveness and a unit of singularity must be distinguished. The United States Army is one because of its comprehensiveness. Whereas, a soldier is a unit because of his singularity. The human body is used to illustrate the body of Christ in I Corinthians 12. The different members of the body, such as the foot, hand, eye, etc., demonstrate the singularity of a unit. However, the body as a whole illustrates the comprehensiveness of unity. There is a place and a job for each member in the body that Christ is continuing to build. Unity is higher than the oneness of a unit. It is the unity of an aggregate. This may be illustrated by catching bees one by one and placing them in a box. Soon there will be hundreds of bees but no hive, resulting in only a conglomerate with hundreds of problems. Most religious institutions are filled with a conglomerate of people with different ideas, and they never go beyond a unit to the comprehensiveness of unity.

Unity consists in submission to one single influence. The Holy Spirit of God is our Teacher. One cannot produce unity by ecclesiastical discipline or some form of expression, such as, "let us agree to differ." There are no disorders in the comprehensiveness of Biblical truth. When truth compromises with error, truth suffers because error has no truth to surrender. Is a limited message more important than a limited fellowship? Is a so-called larger sphere of service more important than obedience to revealed truth?

The unity of the faith is progressive sanctification. This is that for which believers strive (Eph. 4:13). While there is no doubt that all the members of the bride of Christ shall believe

exactly alike when we inherit the kingdom, we become progressively alike while we are on the earth. The Greek word for “come” in Paul’s statement “Till we all come in the unity of the faith” is an aorist active subjunctive of *katantao*, which means we may arrive at as a goal (Eph. 4:13). This unity is sought in the following ways: (1) Unity of the faith is brought about by the elder proclaiming the one faith or system of truth (Phil. 1:27; Jude 3). This proclamation brings the called-out ones from backgrounds of error, superstition, and ignorance into a growing understanding of all the principles of unity. (2) Unity in the knowledge of the Son of God centers in Jesus Christ as the object of faith. In Ephesians 4:13, the Greek word for knowledge (*epignosis*) refers to a full knowledge in the sense of intimate awareness of the character and will of God. It does not refer to mere abstract knowledge. (3) Unity of mature persons concerning the fullness of Christ is our goal. As long as the ministry to the body of Christ continues, she will not be of full age.

There are three primary hindrances to progress in the unity of the faith: (1) Some people romanticize the past by giving assembly history a quality it does not deserve. No one can prove a Biblical subject by history. The Bible is the only criterion for settling Biblical questions. (2) Others absolutize the past by giving it a norm for all time. Their constant reference to the past as though it were absolute makes one wonder if they will be satisfied with the kingdom. (3) Many criticize the study of eschatology—last things—by saying we are to live in the “now” and not worry about the future. Scripture teaches that Christianity is essentially a life of hope; therefore, no one can live a meaningful life in the present unless his hope is anchored in the future.

Members of the local assembly are commanded to strive for the unity of our minds flowing together with the mind of Christ: “Let this mind [*phroneo*, present active imperative, to

think] be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). We are commanded “to think” as Christ thinks, and that thinking must be constant. The thoughts of Christ by which we are to be controlled have been recorded in Scripture. Only when our minds flow together under the control of Christ’s mind shall our wills merge and our movements harmonize in time and step with God’s will.

The exhortation and command of Ephesians 4:1-3 are followed by a description of the unity that is to be guarded. The cardinal adjective “one” (*heis*) is used to introduce each of the seven features of this unity. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. All seven features, according to the context, must be spiritual.

1. The one body, which is absolutely spiritual, will come to the unity of the faith. The unity of the body in the eternal kingdom is the goal toward which local assemblies strive in time. Two principle views of the body are taught: (1) the local assembly and (2) two aspects of the assembly—invisible and visible. Since this is part of the description of the unity of the Spirit, it refers to that which is spiritual. The local congregation, even though it is spiritual to an extent, will not qualify as the one body. Paul was addressing Christians who had passed from death into life and who constituted a part of this spiritual body. Since we are related to Christ, we are part of His assembly, which is His body, by the one Spirit who is continuing to form the assembly to the one hope in which our calling has summoned us. The body refers to the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. The apostle was not speaking of the institutional body, consisting of both saved and lost, but of the one assembly which Jesus Christ is continuing to build.

2. There is one Spirit. The Holy Spirit is third in the natural order in the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Lord

Jesus is subordinate to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is subordinate to both the Father and the Son. The immediate context of Ephesians 4:4-6 explains the reversal of the normal order in the Godhead: “For through him [Jesus Christ] we both have access by [in] one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18). The Holy Spirit applies the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that the Father planned. The application of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in regeneration enables the elect to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior, and through Him we have access to God the Father.

3. There is one hope. The one body and the one Spirit correspond with the one hope in which we were called (Eph. 4:4). God leaves no doubt as to whether this one hope is the principle of hope—subjective, or whether it is the object of our hope—objective. Jesus Christ is the Object of this objective hope. We are saved in the sphere of hope (Rom. 8:24), and “...the hope set before us...we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil” (Heb. 6:18, 19). The Christian hope is unfailingly certain. An anchor is the symbol of this hope. As the anchor enables a ship to outride the storm, the one hope of Christians enables us to outride the storms of life.

Hope is a pleasing expectation of something good, and it will never cause us to be ashamed (Rom. 5:5). What God has promised will surely come to pass. Like the helmet of salvation, this hope guards the heart in the day of battle (I Thess. 5:8). Like the anchor of the soul, it secures us during the time of storm (Heb. 6:19). Like a pleasing companion, it travels with us through the wilderness (Heb. 6:11). Jesus Christ is the Object of this hope (Titus 2:13). The end of hope is Jesus Christ and His kingdom, which is eschatological. Hope purifies as Jesus Christ is pure (I John 3:3). The purpose of hope is to purge and work a suitableness in the life that it might be becoming to the things believed and hoped for. The Christian

cannot live in that which Jesus Christ came to take away and destroy (I John 3:5, 8).

The one hope is founded in the eternal covenant and the unconditional covenants of Scripture. Our hope is based on the present for confirmation, which is given to us by Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture. This hope is based on the future for its realization at the second advent of Jesus Christ (II Tim. 4:1).

4. There is one Lord (Eph. 4:5). The one Lord is Jesus Christ, the one Savior, the only begotten God (John 1:18).

5. There is one faith (Eph. 4:5). Is this the subjective principle of faith within the regenerated person, or is it the objective system of truth committed to our care? The context will help us determine the answer to these questions. The word “faith” (*pistis*) is used as a noun in verses 5 and 13. It cannot be subjective faith in verse 13, because the preceding verses teach that Jesus Christ has given gifted men to the body of Christ for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ until we all arrive in the unity of the faith. Hence, the faith of verses 5 and 13 is objective. It refers to the system of truth that has been committed to God’s saints. It is used the same way in Paul’s exhortation to the Christians at Philippi: “...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith [*pistis*] of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). Continuance in the faith of Colossians 1:23 is not continuance in subjective faith. When God gives the principle of faith, it can never be lost or taken away. Therefore, the faith refers to the system of truth revealed to the saints. By continuing in the system of truth, the Christian manifests that he is a child of God. He becomes “established in the faith” (Col. 2:6, 7). He holds “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (I Tim. 3:9). He is “nourished up in the words of the faith” (I Tim. 4:6). He “should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto

the saints” (Jude 3). But we do not have to go outside the immediate context to learn that the “one faith” of Ephesians 4:5 is the truth that has been revealed and committed to our trust. Hence, it is objective faith.

6. There is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). A person’s belief on the teaching of the one body (*soma*) will determine his interpretation of the one baptism. Some who believe the body is true believers who make up the body that Christ is continuing to build teach that this baptism is the ordinance of baptism. However, water is not necessary to the unity of the body. The common view among religionists is that the one baptism is the baptism in the Spirit (regeneration). Since all seven features of the unity are spiritual, the one baptism is also spiritual; but it is not spiritual in the sense of regeneration. It refers to the one baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost. (This truth is expounded in the chapter entitled, BIRTH OF THE ASSEMBLY.) The one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 is not ritual, that is, water baptism. Furthermore, it is not Spirit baptism, being planted into the body of Christ by regeneration. The one baptism is the one baptism of the one body at Pentecost by Christ to empower the assembly for service.

7. There is one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:6). Confusion over one Spirit, one Lord Jesus Christ, and one God and Father above (*epi*) all, through (*dia*) all, and in (*en*) all of verses 4-6 is unnecessary. Does this signify one God plus one God plus one God? One times one times one correctly identifies the comprehensive unity in the Godhead. There is one God, not three gods. Although the unity of God means there is one God in opposition to the claim that there are many gods and many lords, internal distinctions in the one essence are implied. The sovereign God is above all. He is through all through the work of Jesus Christ. He is in all by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christ's use of the word "one" in John 10:30—"I and my Father are [not is] one [neuter gender of *heis*]"—is very important. Although the Holy Spirit is always referred to in the neuter gender, He is a Person. Gender was not as important to the Greeks as it is to us. The word "one" in John 10:30 is neuter, referring to the one substance. If it were masculine, it would have to refer to a Person. Conclusively, the Father and Son are one in nature and purpose.

The Greek word for God, *theos*, sometimes denotes Deity without reference to either Trinity or any particular Person within the Godhead. When *theos* is used to designate one Person in the Godhead—Father (Eph. 4:6), Son (John 1:18), or Holy Spirit (Acts 5:4)—the word is used in the sense of Deity, not of Trinity. God is not merely one. He is the only one: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (I Cor. 8:6). When an essence is finite and limited, there can be only one person in that essence. But this is not true when the essence is infinite. The essence of the one God is infinite, not finite and limited. The unity in God is unique. It is the only one of its kind. The one God is simultaneously three Persons, and the three Persons is one God. We do not say that one God is three Gods, that one Person is three Persons, or that three Gods are one God. We Biblically say that there is one God with three distinctions of being—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One who says he believes in God the Father but denies either Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. In the power of the regenerating Holy Spirit, who has applied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to our hearts, we have access to God the Father through Christ.





# 16

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## CHRIST'S LAST WORDS TO HIS ASSEMBLIES

After describing the terrible time that will come on this world and the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, the ascended glorified Lord gave His final words to His assemblies. The theme of Revelation 21 continues through Revelation 22:5. The first five verses of chapter 22 are included in John's description of the new Jerusalem. The last words of any person who has been recognized as one in a place of leadership are meaningful, but the last words of Christ must take precedence over those of any mortal being. The last words of Jesus Christ to the assemblies are recorded in Revelation 22:6-21.

The Lord God is the Author of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The sayings of the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, are faithful and true: "And He said to me [John], These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His messenger to show to His slaves the things which must come to pass soon" (Rev. 22:6—translation). Three times in the Revelation, John affirmed that these are Divine predictions: "These are the true

sayings of God” (19:9); “Write: for these words are true and faithful” (21:5); and “These sayings are faithful and true” (22:6). These words are faithful and true because they came from the One who in the prologue is called the faithful One (1:5). The agency of the Holy Spirit on the Lord’s writers and their ability to foretell the future is intended in the Lord God sending His messenger to show to His slaves things which of necessity must come to pass. Foretelling, which is mentioned four times in the epilogue, is emphasized in this prophecy.

God’s messenger declared that Jesus Christ is coming soon and pronounced blessing on the ones keeping the prophecy of this book: “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7—translation). This is the sixth beatitude recorded in Revelation. The demonstrative pronoun “this” in reference to the book designates the book of Revelation. This demonstrative pronoun is emphasized several times in Christ’s last words to His assemblies. When John heard and saw these things, he fell down before the feet of the angel who showed them to him: “And I, John, am the one hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things” (22:8—translation). But the angel told him he must not do that because he was his fellow slave. He must worship God: “And he says to me, you must not do that; I am your fellow slave, and of your brethren the prophets, and of the ones keeping the sayings of this book; worship God” (22:9—translation). Christians bow to no man or angel. We bow only to Jehovah God. John was told not to seal the words of the prophecy of this book because the time is near: “And He says to me, do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book: for the time is near” (22:10—translation). This command is in contrast to the Lord’s command to Daniel to seal the prophecy of his book (Dan. 12:4).

John closed Revelation with the last words of Christ to His

assemblies with a series of miscellaneous observations: “The one acting unjustly, let him act unjustly still; and the filthy one, let him act filthily still; and the righteous one, let him practice righteousness still; and the holy one, let him be holy still” (22:11—translation). He mentioned the misery of the unjust and the joy of the just. Christians are not miserable. We have a joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is no circumstance in life that can remove the Divine joy given to us by grace. One will be forever what he is when death takes him. Would you like to be for eternity what you are presently? Eternity is a state of fixedness. What is your life? Physical life is like a vapor that appears for a time and then vanishes. Morally, it is related to eternity; physically, it is related to time.

Jesus Christ is coming soon with His reward for every man according to his work: “Behold, I am coming soon; and my reward is with me, to render to each one as is his work” (22:12—translation). Rewards are promised and blessings are great for those who are faithful to God and His word. After announcing that He is the first and the last, He pronounced the seventh beatitude on the ones washing their robes in order that their authority shall be over the tree of life and they may enter through the gates into the city: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are the ones washing their robes, in order that their authority shall be over the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (22:13, 14—translation). Outside the city, eternal kingdom, are dogs: “Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the whoremongers and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone loving and making a lie” (22:15—translation). These are not literal people, but the term is one of ridicule placed on wicked people. The Lord Jesus said, “Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine, they will trample them under their feet, and turning again may attack” (Matt. 7:6—translation). Following lawful judgment, our Lord showed the importance of

exercising discretion as to persons with whom we speak concerning spiritual matters. The term dogs is used in other references (Luke 16:21; Phil. 3:2; II Pet. 2:22). Outside the city there are also sorcerers (*pharmakos*)—those who practice magic; whoremongers ( *pornos*)—sexual immorality, murderers, idolaters; and everyone loving and making a lie (*pseudos*)—untrue, unreal, or imitation. People love imitations.

Jesus Christ, the source and the descendant of David sent His messenger to testify these things to the assemblies. There is no reference to Christ's assemblies since Revelation 3 until Revelation 22:16—"I, Jesus, sent my messenger to testify to you these things in the assemblies. I myself am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star" (translation). This is the last reference to the assemblies recorded in Scripture. The Lord's personal public ministry began with His star (Matt. 2:2), and His last words include what He had to say about His being the bright morning star. Jesus Christ will be the morning star to the bride, and He will be the sun of righteousness to Israel (Mal. 4:2). The star applies to the redeemed in the sense of the day star that has risen in our hearts as a result of the work of grace God has done in us (II Pet. 1:19).

Christ's last words to the assemblies prove the consummation of God's purpose will be His personal coming to occupy the throne of His Father David, which He is not presently occupying. The messengers were sent to testify to the local assemblies, represented by the seven assemblies of Revelation 2-3. Since this prophecy is for all assemblies for all time, it is for all believers associated with these assemblies. The truth to be testified to the assemblies is that Jesus Christ is "the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star" (22:16). The heart of eschatology is revealed in our Lord's words in the epilogue. His last words prove that the purpose of His coming would be to sit on the throne of His father

David. Jesus Christ was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:3, 4). David's Son is David's Lord. This duality is understandable in terms of Christ's Person, His hypostatic union. The Pharisees knew that the Messiah would be the Son of David, but they rejected Him as David's Lord (John 10:33).

The seven stars of Revelation 1:20, who were the seven messengers of the seven assemblies of Revelation 2-3, represent ministers of the assemblies since that time. They will fade into insignificance when Jesus Christ comes as the bright morning star. Jesus Christ Himself will be the eternal Teacher, and earthly ministers will not be needed.

The kingdom is represented by morning; hence, Christ spoke of Himself as the "morning" star. The kingdom is portrayed as "a morning without clouds" (II Sam. 23:4). This enabled David to say, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). In contrast to the night, Jesus Christ is the bright morning star. The bright morning star in His own personal effulgence and not through others will usher in the morning of the kingdom. The period preceding the morning is the night, the period in which we are living. But Christ's coming is likened to the morning: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12). "At evening time, behold, there is terror! Before the morning they are no more. Such will be the portion of those who plunder us, And the lot of those who pillage us" (Is. 17:14 NASB). Such are the people for whom no morning shall dawn. The wicked shall be consumed and rooted out before the kingdom. The only way Scripture will be fulfilled is for Christ to come as the Son of David, the Son of man, to reign visibly on the earth, sitting on the throne of His father David.

The Lord's going forth is prepared as the morning (Hos.

6:3). The events associated with the morning are of such nature that they can be realized only after Christ's second advent. (1) The resurrection and dominion of the saints are connected with the morning without clouds (Ps. 49:14, 15; 88:13; 143:8). (2) The destruction and removal of the wicked are identified with the incoming morning (Is. 17:14; Zech. 14; Mal. 4). (3) The morning is connected with the rule of Christ and the glorification of the saints (Ps. 110:2, 3).

The coming morning gives preciousness to the promises. What is more certain than the morning? The Divine order is first evening and then morning (Gen. 1:5). All of God's evenings will burst into mornings. The evening of the world has been dark and depressing, but Christ shall be as the light of the morning. The morning light is pure and undisturbed. This follows the purifying judgment. All those whose eyes have been touched with grace will welcome Jesus Christ when He comes, but all who have not been touched by grace will be destroyed by the velocity of His light. He will come with such velocity that the wicked will be revealed, and "the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (II Thess. 2:8).

The bride is brought into being by the Holy Spirit: "And the Spirit and the bride are saying, Come. And let the one hearing say, Come. And let the one thirsting come. And let the one desiring Him take the water of life without charge" (Rev. 22:17—translation). The Holy Spirit regenerates all the Father gave to the Son, making them a part of the bride. The bride re-echoes every message given by the Holy Spirit through His servants. Hence, the Holy Spirit and the bride together are saying, "Come." The invitation to the hearers, the thirsty, and the desirers does not apply to sinners. It refers to the saved who shall receive rewards according to the deeds done in their bodies. Hearing, thirsting, and desiring are gifts of God.

Abraham, who typifies God the Father, sent his servant. The servant represents God-called servants led by the Holy Spirit. He was sent to find a bride, who typifies the bride of Christ, for Isaac. Isaac foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom (Gen. 24). The servant presented Rebekah as a pure virgin to Isaac. Paul expressed his desire to present the Corinthian Christians to Jesus Christ as a pure virgin: “I wish you would be patient with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are being patient with me. For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the snake deceived Eve in his cleverness, your minds should be seduced from the sincerity and purity in Christ” (II Cor. 11:1-3—translation). The desire of every God-called minister of Jesus Christ is exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ by the assembly to whom he ministers. The bride of Christ is foreshadowed in Rebekah. The long journey from the place where she embraced the message given to her by the servant and her actually seeing Isaac and becoming his wife symbolizes the Christian’s journey from the time he embraces the glorious gospel of Christ until he finishes his course. While awaiting the Lord’s return, we bear witness to everyone who will hear the words of the prophecy of this book.

### **Warning Against Adding To Or Taking From The Word Of God**

The two most controversial verses in Revelation 22 are verses 18 and 19—“I am bearing witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone may add to them, God shall add to him the plagues having been written in this book; and if anyone may take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his portion from the tree of life and from the holy city, and of the

things having been written in this book” (translation). The conjunction “if” (*ean*) used with the subjunctive verb (*epithe*, from *epitithemi*) denotes a possibility among members of a local assembly. Apostates in local assemblies necessitated the warning given in the Lord’s last words to the assemblies. Simon Magus (Acts 8) believed, was baptized, and became part of the assembly in Samaria; but he was an apostate. There were apostates in the assembly in Laodicea. The warning is extended to the copyist who would copy the original manuscript. It refers to deliberate and willful falsification of the word, misrepresentation, spurious revelation—like the revelations of Mohammed and Joseph Smith, the addition of unwritten traditions—like those of Roman Catholicism, or anything that affects the actual truth of Holy Scripture. They make void the word of God through their traditions (Mark 7:1-14).

If anyone adds to the prophecy of Revelation, God shall add to him the plagues. A study of the plagues (*plegas*, accusative plural of *plege*), a word found 21 times in the New Testament, 15 of which are in Revelation (9:20; 11:6; 13:3, 12, 14; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21—twice; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18), will leave no doubt that they apply to the unregenerate.

The person guilty of taking from the book of Revelation will be shut out from the future privileges of sharing the tree of life and the holy city (Rev. 22:19). No one will be deprived of something already bestowed—a place in the book of life. Humanly speaking, God has many books in His library: (1) The book of life is the register of the elect (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:15). (2) The book of the living records all those not written with the righteous (Ps. 69:28). (3) The book of the law includes all the Old Testament Scriptures (Gal. 3:10). (4) God’s book of remembrance records the deeds of those who fear the Lord (Ps. 56:8; Mal. 3:16). (5) The book that records all the deeds of evil men will be opened when they stand



before the great white throne judgment. God does not need literal books, but He condescended to speak to us in terms we can understand. He has infinite knowledge and needs no bookkeeping system. Those who think God keeps literal books have a human understanding of God.

God wrote the names of all the ones He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life. The names recorded in the book of life cannot be erased: "The one overcoming [the true believer—I John 5:1-5] shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I shall by no means erase his name from the book of life, and I shall confess his name before my Father, and before His angels" (Rev. 3:5—translation). The register where the names of all the elect are recorded is the infinite mind of God. The omniscient God who wrote our names in the Lamb's book of life is the Registrar. Think of His qualifications. He is perfect, has perfect wisdom, unfailing omniscience, unspotted justice, and eternal love. The registered are the elect who He has always loved. No grace and honor can compare with our names being recorded before the world began in the Lamb's book of life. This marvelous truth was unknown to us until after God regenerated us, thus making us alive, and we started studying the Scriptures.

One can know whether or not his name is in the Lamb's book of life. Christians need to be subjected to the word of God and know the mind of God. Every hearing ear and receiving mind will rejoice. Peter admonished Christians to make our calling and election sure (II Pet. 1:10). One who cannot make his calling and election sure has no hope of the hereafter. Paul knew the Thessalonian saints were God's chosen ones: "Remembering unceasingly your manifestation of faith and toil of love and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; having known, brethren that you have been loved by God, the choosing of

you” (I Thess. 1:3, 4—translation). Perfect participles are used for “having known” and “have been loved,” proving that we have been eternally loved by the Father.

When the antichrist appears, “And all the ones dwelling on the earth shall worship him, everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb having been slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8—translation). Revelation 17:8 records a similar statement. The ones who will worship the antichrist will be those whose names were not written in the Lamb’s book of life. “And there shall by no means enter into it [new Jerusalem] any unclean thing, and the one making an abomination, and a lie, except the ones having been written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27—translation). Conclusively, the names of the nonelect were never written in the Lamb’s book of life.

“I am bearing witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book [*bibliou*, genitive of *biblion*]: If anyone may add to them, God shall add to him the plagues having been written in this book [*biblio*, locative of *biblion*]; and if anyone may take away from the words of the book [*bibliou*, genitive of *biblion*] of this prophecy, God shall take away his portion from the tree [*xulou*, ablative of *xulon*, which means tree, not book] of life and from the holy city, and of the things having been written in this book” (Rev. 22:18, 19—translation). Making the words *xulon dzoe*—tree of life—to mean *biblion dzoe*—book of life—would be inconsistent with all of Scripture. The names of the nonelect not only were not written in the Lamb’s book of life, but these persons shall also be excluded from the blessings of eternity described within the context (Rev. 22:1-5).

The guilty are shut out from the future sharing of the blessings of the tree of life and the holy city rather than their being deprived of something already having been be-

stowed—a place in the book of life. Only the names of the elect are written in the book of life, and they will never be erased. In John 19:22, Pilate said, “What I have written I have written.” If Pilate said that about what he had written, what about God who has permanently written our names in the Lamb’s book of life?

In view of the certainty of Christ’s second advent, all believers have both positive and negative responsibilities:

FIRST—The Christians’ first positive responsibility is to keep the sayings of the prophecy of Revelation: “And Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one keeping [present active participle of *tereo*, which means to observe, keep, guard, treasure, pay attention to, maintain, or watch over protectively] the words of the prophecy of this [a demonstrative pronoun singling out the thing referred to] book” (Rev. 22:7—translation). The events of this prophecy must of necessity come to pass (Rev. 22:6). Therefore, we must treasure the words of this prophecy.

SECOND—The Christians’ second positive responsibility is to cleanse our clothes, which speaks of our deportment: “Blessed are the ones washing [present active participle of *pluno*, which means wash garments] their robes, in order that their authority shall be over the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14—translation). In order to understand this and keep it within context, consider the first five verses of this chapter, which are descriptive of the new Jerusalem: “AND He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of its street, and on this side and that side of the river, was a tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the health of the nations. And every curse shall exist no longer; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it;

and His slaves shall serve Him; And they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall exist no longer; and they shall not have need of light of a lamp and of the sun; because the Lord God shall shine on them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:1-5—translation).

There is a once-for-all washing and then a continuous washing by those who have been washed once-for-all. The Lord is stressing a continuous washing of sanctification by the saints of God. We are responsible to daily cleanse ourselves by taking heed to the word of God, studying and applying the Scriptures: “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth” (John 17:17). We are to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. With the exception of Judas, the disciples, whose feet the Lord washed, had already been washed in regeneration; hence, they needed only to have their feet washed (John 13:7-10). Scripture speaks of those coming out of tribulation whose robes had already been washed in the blood of the Lamb: “...These are they which came [present middle participle of *erchomai*] out of great tribulation, and have washed [aorist active indicative] their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). They were coming out of tribulation, affliction, or distressing circumstances. Hence, they were beyond defilement positionally but not above it conditionally. The purpose for conditional cleansing is in order that their authority shall be over the tree of life, and they may enter through the gate into the city.

THIRD—The Christians’ third positive responsibility is to desire the soon return of Jesus Christ: “And the Spirit and the bride are saying, Come...” (Rev. 22:17—translation). This is referring to the assembly, the redeemed of the Lord who constitute part of the bride. Hence, the bride who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit re-echoes the Spirit’s word, “Come.” This is the last reference to the Holy Spirit in Scripture. The

Bridegroom in His unmediated presence becomes the center of attraction in the city because in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). The latter part of Revelation 22:17—“And let the one hearing say, Come. And let the one thirsting come. And let the one desiring take of the water of life without charge” (translation)—is not, as many teach, the last great invitation to the unregenerate. Only the believer hears, thirsts, and desires the Lord’s coming. As the Lord addressed the saints in the assemblies, He extended an individual call: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches [assemblies]” (Rev. 2; 3). An individual response by those who hear is called for here in Revelation 22:17. As the disciples were taught to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10), every Christian longs for that coming.

FOURTH—The Christians’ first negative responsibility is to not worship creatures: “...I [John] fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. And he says to me, you must not do that; I am your fellow slave...” (Rev. 22:8b, 9a—translation). The angel depreciated himself by stating that he was John’s fellow servant. The last recorded act of this apostle, loved devotedly by the Lord, was that of committing sin. He had the once-for-all washing of regeneration, but he needed continual washing. This is the second recorded commission of the same sin by John (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). John’s falling down to worship the Lord was accepted in Revelation 1:17. The reply to John’s act in that instance was different. The Lord told him to “Fear not; I am the first and the last.” On that occasion, he was honoring the Creator, but he was honoring a creature in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9. John’s homage to the creature was unlawful. Angels minister to the needs of the elect (Heb. 1:14), but they must not be worshipped by the elect. Let us never be guilty of bowing to men or any other creature.

FIFTH—The second negative responsibility is that John

not seal up the prophecy of this book: “And He says to me, do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (Rev. 22:10—translation). This is in contrast to the command to Daniel to seal up the prophecy of Daniel, and he too was giving prophecy of the end time: “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end...” (Dan. 12:4). In Daniel’s case, the assembly age must intervene before the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy of his book. The first advent of Jesus Christ must precede the fulfillment of the prophecy of Revelation. Hence, Daniel was to seal up his prophecy, but John was not to seal up the Revelation. Since we are living at the close of the dispensation of grace, it is time for us to study, keep, observe the prophecy of this book, and declare its truths.

SIXTH—The third negative responsibility is to not add to or take from the prophecy of this book: “I am bearing witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone may add to them, God shall add to him the plagues having been written in this book; and if anyone may take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his portion from the tree of life and from the holy city, and of the things having been written in this book” (Rev. 22:18, 19—translation). This Divine principle was also set forth during the time of Moses (Deut. 4:2). Hence, whether in the Old or New Testament, a person must not add to or take from Divine revelation. The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Holy Scripture in order to secure its inerrability and prevent inaccuracy. The fact that one character could negate the whole content may be illustrated with a stenographer who was given the following dictation: “Gentlemen, we understood your letter and will ‘now’ fill your order.” Imagine the surprise of the employer when he read the letter before signing it, and it read, “Gentlemen, we understood your letter and will ‘not’ fill your order.” We cannot be too careful with the word of God.

## **The Principle Established—**

The principle of not adding to or taking from the word of God is established in Deuteronomy. This is the last book of the Pentateuch, which consists of the first five books of the Bible. All scholars agree that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. At the time of the writing of Deuteronomy, Moses was coming to the conclusion of his life.

The book of Deuteronomy had the same message for the Israelites that II Peter has for Christians today—to call to our remembrance the things that have been written (II Pet. 3:1). The key word in Deuteronomy is obedience, and the key word in the New Testament for the children of God is obedience. We can be obedient because we possess grace and have the responsibility of living right in the sight of God and before those with whom we have to do. Deuteronomy is not the second law, but it was written to remind the Israelites of the law. It is not a history but a review. Line on line and precept on precept are necessary for God's people. Moses pointed out in the book of Deuteronomy that God longed for the obedience of His people. Out of gratitude for God's amazing grace, mercy, and privileges the Israelites should render obedience. Their eyes had seen (Deut. 4:3); Moses had taught them God's word (Deut. 4:5); their nation was greater than any other (Deut. 4:7).

Since no one in the world has such privileges as the children of God, we should take heed to ourselves and keep our souls diligently lest we forget the things we have seen. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. As often as we participate in it, we do so in remembrance of Jesus Christ. No other people heard the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as the Israelites heard, and lived (Deut. 4:33). The Lord brought them out of the land of Egypt (5:6). Exodus and Deuteronomy illustrate

the two great steps of the Christian life. Exodus records Israel's exodus from Egypt, and Deuteronomy records her entrance into the land of promise.

The one test of the reality of the new birth is wrapped up in two questions, both of which have to do with the word *logos*, translated "word." (1) What do you think of Christ the incarnate Word? "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42). (2) How do you treat the written word?

FIRST—What do you think of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word? The unsaved person has the wrong concept of God. He picks out some feature of God and magnifies that feature to the exclusion of all that Scripture says about Jehovah. The following are some of the many erroneous thoughts about Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God:

1. The Christian Scientists say that Jesus is the human man and Christ is the Divine idea; hence, the duality of Jesus the Christ. They believe Jesus was the offspring of Mary's self-conscious communion with God. Their idea is that Mary's conception of Him was spiritual, for only purity could reflect truth and love.

2. The Unity School Of Christianity says the Bible does not refer to Jesus of Nazareth, the outer man. They believe it refers to Christ the spiritual identity of Jesus whom He acknowledged in all His ways and brought forth into His outer life until even the flesh of His body was lifted up, purified, spiritualized, and redeemed. They advocate that in this manner He became Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, and we are to follow Him into the perfect state and become like Him for in each of us is the Christ, the only begotten Son.

3. Mormons claim that Jesus Christ was a polygamist. They assume that Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus were His



plural wives, and Mary Magdalene was another. Their supposition is that the feast in Cana was the occasion of one of His own marriages. They believe He could see His own seed before He was crucified; furthermore, the passages indicating a plurality of gods are numerous in the inspired writings.

4. Ambassador College states that before Jesus Christ was conceived by Mary, He was not the Son of God. They believe God is the Divine family, and He was one of that family. They proclaim that Jesus Christ was in human flesh in His first birth, a descendant from David; and by the resurrection from the dead (born again), the Son of God is now no longer human but composed of Spirit—a Spirit being. They claim that no Scripture says that Jesus Christ could not sin, and when we are born of God we shall be of His very family; we shall be Spirit as He is Spirit, Divine as He is Divine.

5. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that our Redeemer existed as a spirit before He was made flesh, at which time He was properly known as "a god," as chief of the angels and next to the Father. They believe He was known as the archangel, whose name Michael signifies "who as God" or "God's representative." Their opinion is that Jesus Christ could not be part God and part man because that would be more than the law required; neither was Jesus the combination of the two natures—human and spiritual. They conclude that Divine justice could not accept such a ransom; the Lord Jesus who is now exalted to the Divine nature is no longer a man but a Spirit being.

6. Unitarians believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and then with the next breath say, "I believe in the divinity of mankind." They deny the exclusive deity of Jesus Christ and do not believe the infinite can be compressed within the form of one being. They declare that Jesus Christ differs from other men only in His greater capacity for the one life.

7. All who believe in the peccability of Jesus Christ can be classified with the preceding heretical views of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they say Jesus Christ had the capacity to sin, they identify themselves with all the former views.

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the impeccable Savior of the elect. All the preceding thoughts concerning Him are heretical in the light of Holy Scripture. Since the unsaved do not have reverential fear of God, theirs is a slavish fear of God. There are 18 different Hebrew words and 10 different Greek words translated “fear.” They describe fear in the form of terror, reverential fear, or apprehensive fear of some danger to which one may be exposed. The means God uses to keep His people from departing from Him is the reverential fear that He places in the hearts of the redeemed: “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32:40).

Paul distinguished the spirit of bondage from the Spirit of fear (Rom. 8:15). God promised Israel that all nations would have slavish fear because of her: “This day will I begin to put the dread of thee [Israelites] and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee” (Deut. 2:25). Because of slavish fear, the unsaved are fearful of the punishment they will receive. But they cannot have sin without the punishment that accompanies it. People are fearful of AIDS, but they have no fear of God, because they do not repent. They do not fear sin. They only want “safe” sin.

The parable of the talents proves the unregenerate do not reverentially fear God (Matt. 25:14-30). The one who received one talent and hid it replied to the returned lord’s interrogation concerning his talent by calling him a hard man.

That is not the language of a Christian concerning God. The man was afraid of God because he had a distorted view of Him. Since the unsaved are spiritually blind, they have a wrong concept of God. The Christian and non-Christian concept of God differ. God Himself is not severe, but severity is an element in God's character. To say that God is severe is only partially true, and partial truth is falsehood. One must not pick out the violent element and say, this is God. Love is also one element in God's character. Religionists know only an isolated feature of God; hence, they do not know the God of Scripture. An isolated feature does not give a true perspective of God. A beautiful face becomes repulsive when dissected. Each feature loses its beauty, but all together there is beauty. God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, love, just, severe, holy, a God of judgment, etc. Only when all these features are considered together do we see the God of Scripture.

The root of spiritual knowledge is the fear of the Lord. Paul exhorted Christians to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the mind, perfecting holiness in the reverential fear of God (II Cor. 7:1). This reverential fear is filial fear, a fear resulting from relationship. A Christian does not want to grieve the Holy Spirit by doing something to dishonor God. What God is inspires awe in the person who has been saved. What God does for His people commands affection. Although the word is fear, it does not exclude a filial confidence and a conscious peace. Fear is the foundation; knowledge is the superstructure. Where there is no foundation, there is no superstructure. The Christian is not afraid of God, but he is afraid of sin that grieves the heart of God. The believer hates sin though he sometimes sins.

Fearing retribution is not hating sin. Men may be afraid of God and yet may love their sins. That would be living in the slavish fear of the Lord. Perfect love casts out fear in the one who has the love of God in his heart (I John 4:18). The love

which God gives to an individual who has been regenerated drives out that old slavish fear. By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil (Prov. 16:6). The Christian does not search for a safe way to sin and continue committing the same sins. He departs from them. God puts the fear of Himself in the heart of each person He saves so that he departs from evil and cleaves to the Lord by means of that God-given fear. Godly fear is a permanent principle wrought in the soul by the Spirit in regeneration, and it is a token of election.

The fear of God is the God-begotten fear of sin: “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil...” (Prov. 8:13). The fear of the Lord is strong confidence: “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge” (Prov. 14:26). The godly are safe because they are saved. There is no confidence in slavish fear, but there is confidence in reverential fear. To fear God aright is to be delivered from slavish fear. That is the difference between salvation and no salvation. “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life...” (Prov. 14:27). The fountain denotes a continuous and inexhaustible source. The spiritual life cannot continue without food. The child of God hungers and thirsts for righteousness, but this is impossible among those who have not been born of God. God uses means, and fear is the means by which we do not depart from God (Jer. 32:40). Godly fear is a permanent principle wrought in the soul by the Spirit in regeneration, and it is a token of Divine election. Beware of any conception of sin which does not create in one the fear of and hatred for sin. Fear is to be understood for the majesty of God: “And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the LORD, which is great and terrible...” (Neh. 4:14). God’s presence is terrible and fearful, even when He comes to bring news of mercy (Rev. 1:12-18).

SECOND—How do you treat the written word? A person’s

thoughts of the incarnate Word will determine his treatment of the written word. The unsaved person has the wrong concept of God. He picks out some feature of God and magnifies that feature to the exclusion of all that Scripture has to say about Jehovah. The original manuscript is complete. Every word and every character is inspired. This Divinely inspired word is also capable of equipping us for every need and work (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

Moses commanded the Israelites to heed the commandments he was giving them and warned them not to add to or take from them: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). Those who love God love His word and obey it: "My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly" (Ps. 119:167). Those who serve God love His word and take refuge in Him as their shield: "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. 30:5). Two words to be considered are (1) vision, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov. 29:18), and (2) pure, "Every word of God is pure..." (Prov. 30:5). The Hebrew word for vision means revelation or oracle. The word for pure comes from the Hebrew word which means to refine or test. It literally means to be separated from all dross. Nothing is learned by abstract speculation. We must go to God's objective revelation. The word of God is absolutely free of all dross.

The absolutely pure word cannot have anything added to perfect it. Therefore, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6). We must not add to the word of God in opinion by exercising our own belief or judgment, as though God's word were defective as it has been given to us. People who are possessed with the Spirit of regeneration have the same enlightening Holy Spirit;

hence, any disagreement comes from our lack of understanding of what God has committed to us. Two born-again people sitting with an open Bible will come to the same conclusion on the teaching of Scripture. One of them may better understand it because of the longevity of his Christian life and his having a greater knowledge of Scripture.

We must not add to the word of God by introducing any religious custom other than that which God Himself has appointed. We must neither take away nor set aside anything that God has appointed as needless or superfluous. Paul admonished the Corinthian saints to keep the ordinances or traditions as he delivered them (I Cor. 11:2). The Corinthians were adding to God's word in their manner of observing the Lord's Supper. There were factions among them, and they were eating their own supper and getting drunk on the wine that should have been used in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Some today take from the word of God by refusing to use wine in the observance of the Lord's Supper. They must be more religious than Paul who was inspired of God to give this truth. Furthermore, they must be more righteous than those who had wine at the wedding feast (John 2). Unfermented wine makes as much sense as unfrozen ice because wine cannot be made without fermentation. Paul had a problem with some of the Corinthians. They were not "remembering" what Jesus Christ had done; therefore, they were coming together to eat their meals. Paul reminded them that they had homes for that. He did not solve the difficulty with many of the Corinthians by changing the liquid used in the observance of the Lord's Supper but by giving them the truth concerning the Supper and by turning their minds to remembering what Jesus Christ had done for them.

We must not add to the word of God in practice. We are responsible by the indwelling Holy Spirit of grace not to add to the word by practicing what the word of God forbids and

not to take away from it by disobedience to what the word of God requires. Adding to or taking away goes far beyond the idea of those who receive so-called revelations and proclaim them.

Moses was not adding to the word when he was giving the Pentateuch. The same is true of the prophets who wrote the historical books of the Old Testament, the writers of the poetical books, the prophetic books, the four Gospels, Acts, assembly Epistles, pastoral Epistles, general Epistles, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ. These were not additions to the word of God because God was continuing to give His word (Heb. 1:1, 2). All these books are necessary to give us God's message that He would have His people to have. Adding puts human commands on the level with God's inspired word, and that is forbidden. Human opinions, interpretations, reasoning, or taking from the word would keep from the people important requirements of God. Any man of God today who is not faithful to declare the whole counsel of God is keeping things from the people which they need to hear, and he is guilty in that sense.

### **The Principle Illustrated—**

The principle of not adding to or taking from the word of God refers to anything that affects the actual truth of God. The opponents to God's word are the precursors of the great apostasy which is near at hand (II Thess. 2). People will be given over to an awful working of error. We are already beginning to see forerunners of that apostasy. As Jesus Christ at His first advent had John the Baptist as His forerunner preparing the way for His incarnation and manifestation, the great apostasy will have its forerunners.

A Biblical example of one who mishandled the word of God is recorded in Jeremiah 36. Jeremiah gave us the first

recorded instance of the rejection and mutilation of the written word of God. Jeremiah 36 could be entitled, "Mutilation Of The Bible." Mutilation and rejection have become common practice in various forms in our day. Many do not actually take a pen knife, cut up the word, and throw it in the fire; but they either deny it, fail to obey it, or seek to add to it with their own traditions and human opinions. One is just as reprehensible as the other.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah (Jer. 36:1). Jeremiah was told to write the word from the Lord against Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the day the Lord spoke to him, from the days of Josiah even to the day God's word came to him. The purpose was that perhaps the house of Judah would hear all the evil God purposed to do to them, and they might repent.

Jehoiakim's name means "Jehovah will set up." Josiah, whose name means "he will be sustained by Jehovah," was his godly father. Jehoiakim was a wicked king, but Josiah was one of the eight good kings in Judah. During Josiah's reign, the word of God, which had been lost, was found. When the word of God was read to him, he repented; and Josiah took the word which had been found, gave it to the people, and led them into a great revival (II Chron. 34). The whole counsel of God has not been proclaimed in our generation and in several preceding generations. Thus, the purity of the word of God has been lost.

Jehoiakim was exposed to the truth by his father. He was successor to the throne, but he was a wicked king. The most wicked person in the world is one who has been brought up in a Christian home, exposed to the truth, and then he becomes an apostate. The piety of a Christian parent is no guarantee of the piety of his child. This does not eliminate parental responsibility. Every parent is responsible to bring up his children



in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The promise that when they grow old they will not depart from truth (Prov. 22:6) is no guarantee of salvation. It simply means they can never get away from the truth to which they have been subjected. There are none so wicked as those who become so after pious training. They cannot have quietness in vice until they have stupefied their consciences or had their consciences seared. The greater the obstacle that hinders indulgence in lusts, the greater the manifestation of depravity afterwards. Peter said it would have been better had they never known the way of righteousness than after having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them, because they will become as hogs wallowing again in the mire and as dogs returning to their vomit (II Pet. 2:21, 22).

The word of God itself did not come from Jeremiah. It was not his opinion. The word came from the Lord through Jeremiah. The prophet did not dictate according to his own will or whatever came to his mind. Jeremiah stood between God and Baruch: "Then Jeremiah called Baruch...and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book" (Jer. 36:4). The Holy Spirit enabled the prophet to recite what God had commanded, even the things he had forgotten. Here is inspiration. All Scripture is God-breathed (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Inspiration has to do with the writings themselves. Ideas cannot be communicated except by words. The Bible is plenary and verbally inspired. Plenary inspiration signifies all the Bible is equally inspired, and verbal inspiration means the Bible is inspired to its very words. The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture to the very letter in order to assure its inerrability and accuracy.

Because Jeremiah had been shut up, he could not go into the house of the Lord (Jer. 36:5). Therefore, he commanded Baruch to go read the words he had written from Jeremiah's

mouth in the Lord's house on the fasting day (Jer. 36:6). Some think Jeremiah's being shut up refers to his being imprisoned. However, the context explains that it refers to the Lord's having hidden him: "But the king commanded Jerahmeel...and Shelemiah...to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them" (Jer. 36:26). This assures the children of God that we are protected by God until we have finished the purpose for which God has brought us into the world. No weapon that is formed against God's servant shall prosper (Is. 54:17). God's servants are immortal until God is through with them. Herod destroyed the male children, but God hid His Christ (Matt. 2:13-16). Another Herod beheaded John the Baptist but failed to destroy his testimony. Wicked hands took Jesus Christ and nailed Him to the cross, but God raised Him out from among the dead (Acts 2:22, 23). The world imprisoned the apostles, stoned Stephen, put James to the sword, and persecuted the assembly; nevertheless, the word of God increased.

The fasting day was the most suitable time for the reading of the word. It was a feast time, and the people were assembled. There would be a great concourse of people, and the proclaimed fast should be the time when the people would be most receptive. Baruch did as Jeremiah commanded. He took the roll on which the words were written, came to the people, and read in the hearing of all the people. This resulted in Micaiah going to the king's house and declaring to those in the scribe's chamber the words he had heard. The princes who sat there sent Jehudi for Baruch to read the words to them. When they heard the words, they were afraid (Jer. 36:16). The princes went to the king's court, but they laid up the roll in Elishama the scribe's chamber, "and told all the words in the ears of the king" (Jer. 36:20). The king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll, and Jehudi read it in the ears of the king and all the princes who stood with the king. When Jehudi had read three or four leaves, the king cut it with a pen knife and cast it in

the fire, and it was consumed (Jer. 36:23).

The king treated the word of God with contempt. By placing the roll in the chamber of the scribe, the princes were testifying their respect for the message. Although Jehoiakim had been exposed to good teaching by his godly father, instead of showing respect for the word he showed his contempt by sending an undersecretary to secure it. He showed his rage by cutting the roll and casting it in the fire. The king overlooked the message and refused to hear it, manifested foolish bravery, and had no fear of God before his eyes.

Although the written word was destroyed, the word of God itself was not destroyed. God's message is indestructible. It was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world, and it will go forth and accomplish the purpose for which it has been sent. The written word may be destroyed, but God remains the same. What He has said is the same, and sin remains the same. Sin is still sin, and sin will receive its consequences. Regardless of what people do to the written word, responsibility remains the same. Man is still responsible for his sins. Death and judgment remain the same. The sinner opposes the Bible because he knows it is against him. Living in an unrepentant state, he does not like to have it read or quoted to him. Hence, he would like to destroy it. A person who becomes angry with the word of God that exposes him is as senseless as a patient taking his X-rays and destroying them because he does not like what he sees. His destroying them does not affect his disease.

Having destroyed the roll, the king sought to reprehend Jeremiah and his scribe (Jer. 36:26). But God hid them to protect His own until His purpose in them had been fulfilled. Jehoiakim destroyed the written word; but God again gave the same words to Jeremiah; and they were rewritten (Jer. 36:27-32). Men may destroy the written word, but it will be

rewritten. An American Indian chief was buried with his bow and arrows by his side in order that he might use them if he entered the happy hunting ground. Cicero, a Roman statesman, orator, and writer, lighted a lamp in the grave of his daughter with the thought that possibly her life, though extinguished for a time, might be rekindled. Socrates, the Athenian philosopher, put a cup of hemlock to his lips and said whether he went to perish or to live again he did not know. Voltaire, the French philosopher and historian, said he would pass through the forest of the Scriptures and girdle all its trees so that in a hundred years Christianity would be only a vanishing memory. Whether an American Indian, a Roman statesman, an Athenian philosopher, or a French philosopher, they all manifested ignorance of God's word.

Although we are living in a world of Jehoiakims who are using their pen knives to take from the word of God the things they do not want to hear, the word of God stands permanently written. This author in his last hours just before stepping out of time into eternity would rather part with a soft bed, all the pain-killer drugs—regardless of the severity of his pain, all his friends, even the person dearest to himself—his wife—than to be parted from the word of God that stands written (Read Col. 3:1-4.)

### **Promised Fulfillment Of Hope**

The last of the last words of Jesus Christ to His assemblies magnify His soon return: "The one witnessing these things is saying, Yes indeed I am coming soon. Amen [Hebrew translation of a Hebrew transliteration of a participle meaning assent or confirmation]. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all" (Rev. 22:20, 21—translation). The subject of the Lord's soon return continually causes heated debate between persons who embrace two opposing beliefs—

millennialism and amillennialism. Those who deny the millennium say the millennialists make “near” to become distant, “quickly” to mean ages hence, and “at hand” to signify afar. The following are evidences given by those who hold the view of amillennialism:

1. They say that Christ predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, His coming, and the end of the age in His generation.
2. They claim the book of Revelation describes the horrors that came on the Jews during their war with Rome between 66 A.D. and 70 A.D.
3. They assume that the battle of Armageddon was fought in 70 A.D.
4. They believe the book of Revelation was written before 70 A.D.
5. They say that the immature state of the assembly had given way to the complete state (I Cor. 13:8 ff).
6. They declare that the kingdom had already been established and Christ’s enemies had been destroyed.
7. They presume that Christ’s second coming happened when Jerusalem was destroyed; thus, believers are no longer living under the legal covenant but the new covenant of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.
8. They think that all the Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom and Christ’s return had been fulfilled (Luke 21:22, 31).
9. Their opinion is that this view alone explains “shortly,” “at hand,” and “near” in their true and obvious meaning.

10. They conclude that this view alone answers the false teaching of the charismatics, the miraculous gifts, and the false view of the last days.

In contrast to amillennialists, millennialists believe that “shortly” and “quickly” in Revelation 22:6, 7, and 20, define in this book a prophecy of the day of the Lord with its swiftly succeeding events and will close with a sudden and startling appearance of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of the elect. Prophetic time is reserved by God as especially pertaining to Himself. Nothing in history satisfies the description of the events accompanying Christ’s second advent:

1. Satan’s power has not been destroyed.
2. Satan has not been cast into the bottomless pit.
3. Creation has not been delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the children of God.
4. The restoration of all things has not occurred and will not occur until the second coming of Jesus Christ.
5. Christ has not come to establish His kingdom.
6. Every eye has not seen Christ.
7. The knowledge of the Lord does not cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, during which time all weapons of warfare shall become tools of peace. All these are prophetic.

Since prophetic time is in God’s hands, He alone can define its meaning. Prophetic time is reserved by God as specially pertaining to Himself and not to you and me. Therefore, any

reference to prophetic time, either as to its beginning or ending, will be according to God's own estimate of time: "...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8). The language of prophetic time is adapted to the salvation of the elect (II Pet. 3:9, 15). The ancient prophets spoke of the promised salvation, the day of the Lord, and the coming of the Mighty One as being near. But the fulfillment of prophecy showed that hundreds of years passed before their fulfillment. Why do the opponents to millennialism object to this form of prophetic expression?

This book of prophecy opens with "Behold, he cometh with clouds" (Rev. 1:7), and it concludes with "Yes indeed, I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:20—translation). Hence, the prologue and the epilogue interlock. There is a difference between "Behold, he cometh with clouds" and "Yes indeed I am coming soon." The former uses the third person singular pronoun, but the latter uses the first person singular pronoun. In the former, the world does not know the Speaker. Every eye shall see Jesus Christ when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords, but the world does not know Him. But in addressing the assemblies, He used the first person singular pronoun; and the assembly will respond. John knew the difference between "He" and "I." Many speak of Jesus Christ in the manner of Revelation 1:7, but those who know Him speak of Him as "my" Savior. Like the Psalmist's saying, "THE LORD is my Shepherd" (Ps. 23:1), John responded as the assemblies respond, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).





# 17

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## AUTHORITY GIVEN TO THE KING'S COMPLETED BRIDE

The “keys of the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 16:19) refer to future authority that shall be given to the King’s completed bride. The noun form of the Greek word for key is *kleis*. It is found only six times in the New Testament (Matt. 16:19; Luke 11:52; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1). The verb form is *kleio*. It is used sixteen times. The noun *kleis* comes from the verb *kleio*, which means to close.

We will learn the basic meaning of the noun *kleis* and its actual significance in Matthew 16:19 from the verses where it is used. (1) “I shall give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatever you may bind on the earth [declare unlawful] shall have already been bound [future perfect passive participle, declare unlawful] in the heavens and whatever you may loose on the earth [declare lawful] shall have already been loosed [future perfect passive participle, declared lawful] in the heavens” (Matt. 16:19—translation). This refers to authority that shall be given to Christ’s completed and perfected bride in the kingdom. (2) “Woe to you lawyers! Be-

cause you took away the key of knowledge, you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered the ones entering” (Luke 11:52—translation). The Lord Jesus was condemning the lawyers for taking the authority to misinterpret the word. In doing this, they took away the entrance to knowledge. (3) “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand on me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living One, and I became dead; and, behold, I am living forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of hades” (Rev. 1:17, 18—translation). This speaks of Jesus Christ’s power or authority over death and the underworld. (4) “And to the messenger of the assembly in Philadelphia write at once; These things says the holy One, the true One, the One having the key of David...” (Rev. 3:7—translation). The key of David refers to the Lord Jesus Christ’s authority in the messianic kingdom. (5) “And the fifth angel sounded a trumpet, and I saw a star having fallen out of the heaven to the earth: and to him was given the key of the pit of the abyss” (Rev. 9:1—translation). In the light of the context, this refers to the Lord’s giving Satan the authority to open the abyss to release demons from the pit during the tribulation period. (6) “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain on his hand” (Rev. 20:1—translation). This authority will be exercised after the tribulation period prior to the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ.

The keys of the kingdom of the heavens are not the abilities to open and expound the gospel truths during the dispensation of grace. A common erroneous view is that Jesus Christ gave Peter the keys, and Peter opened the door first to the Jews (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The keys are not presently given to either the universal assembly or to the local assemblies as a means of preparation for the kingdom. Proper distinction must be made between the kingdom and the assembly.

The text identifies the keys as the keys of the kingdom: “I shall give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens.... For the Son of man is about to come in the glory of the Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his deeds. Truly I am saying to you, There are some of the ones standing here, who shall by no means experience death until they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:19, 27, 28—translation). Jesus Christ will give the keys of the kingdom to His perfected people, not to imperfect assemblies. This authority is not given to any local assembly. It will be given to the general assembly of the firstborn which will constitute the bride of Christ when she shall be made like Jesus Christ without spot or wrinkle. Then she will be given the kingdom, and the assembly will rule and reign with Christ and exercise that power in the kingdom.

The error of identifying the kingdom with the assembly is serious. Such authority could never be committed to imperfect people. Peter was the spokesman for the disciples, but the keys were not given to Peter. Notice that the verb “shall give” is future active indicative of *didomi*. Jesus Christ is continuing to build His assembly; but in the future, He will give the keys of the kingdom to His perfected assembly that He is building. The assembly must be perfected in order to reign and rule over the nations. Church history proves that the attempt by certain ecclesiastical organizations to exercise authority during the present age that will be exercised by the perfected assembly in the future kingdom has been the source of untold evil and disaster.

The authority of the kingdom in Matthew 16:19 differs from the authority in Matthew 18:15-18. The Lord Jesus did not promise to give kingdom authority to the local aspect of the assembly. Limited authority promised to the assembly is exercised in the local aspect of the assembly in time. The context of the authority of Matthew 18:18 proves that assem-

bly discipline is the subject under discussion. The Greek subjunctive mood, which is the mood of probability, is used over and over again in Matthew 18:15-18—"Now if your brother may sin [aorist active subjunctive of *hamartano*, which signifies the probability of your brother's sinning] against you, go and rebuke him between you and him alone; if he hears [aorist active subjunctive of *akouo*, expressing the possibility that your brother may not hear you], you, you have gained your brother. But if he hears not, take with you one or two more, in order that by [instrumental use of *epi*, which means by] the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be confirmed. And if he refuses to hear them, tell the assembly; but if he refuses to hear [aorist active subjunctive of *parakouo*] even the assembly, let him be to you as the Gentile and the publican. Truly I am saying to you, whatever you may bind [aorist active subjunctive of *deo*, showing the possibility of your binding] on the earth shall have already been bound [perfect passive participle of *deo*, which means having been already bound and continuing in that state] in heaven: and whatever you may loose [aorist active subjunctive of *luo*, showing the probability of your loosing] on the earth shall have already been loosed [perfect passive participle of *luo*, which means having been already loosed and continuing in that state] in heaven" (Matt. 18:15-18—translation).

The keys of the kingdom are absent from Matthew 18:15-18 because this passage does not refer to authority that shall be given to the perfected assembly in the future. The context of Matthew 18:18 limits the authority in three respects: (1) It is obviously conferred on the local assembly. (2) It delegates to each assembly the authority of discipline among its own members and is therefore limited to its own affairs. (3) There is no mention of the keys of the kingdom.

In the first and purest period of local assembly history, the

assembly was intermixed with that which did not pertain to it. Judas was among the twelve disciples. Simon Magus was a member of the assembly in Samaria (Acts 8). Among the first public servants were Demus in one assembly and Diotrophes in another. There is no perfect local assembly. The sinning brother within a local assembly sins against God, and his sin against God is a reflection against the assembly. Therefore, the brother against whom he sinned should rebuke him between the two of them. If he refuses to hear the brother, the brother should take two or three witnesses. If he fails to hear them, they should take the matter to the local assembly. The local assembly is the last court of appeal on earth. If he refuses to hear the last court of appeal, the assembly should treat him as a pagan or a publican. Each assembly must judge things within its own assembly. One assembly has no jurisdiction over another. This is exemplified in the seven local assemblies in Revelation 2-3. Each assembly must take care of its own problems.

There is as much difference between the keys of the kingdom and limited authority in local assemblies as there is between our decaying bodies and the perfected body we shall have when we see Jesus Christ face to face. The assembly must be perfected in order to rule and reign with Christ over the nations on the earth. The apostle Paul rebuked the assembly in Corinth, because its members supposed they were presently reigning with Christ. Nevertheless, they were going to heathen people to settle matters that arose in their assembly. Since the saints shall judge the world in the future, we should be able to take care of small matters in the local assembly without going outside its membership (I Cor. 6:1-3). A perfected assembly in the kingdom will exercise unlimited authority. This authority signified in the “keys” has not yet been given to us. Hence, the context of Matthew 18:18 limits the authority there to the local assembly. The keys of the kingdom of the heavens will be administered in the kingdom by a

perfected assembly, whereas limited authority is presently administered by imperfect men in the local aspect of the assembly.

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## **IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR MEMBERS OF EACH LOCAL ASSEMBLY**

Dear Assembly Members:

In view of the escalating changes, not for the better but for the worse, in both society and religion, it is imperative that members of each local assembly of Christ face some important questions.

1. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOCIETY AND THEOLOGICAL UNITY IN THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY?

To force religious freedom in society on the local assembly is death to the assembly. Religion is oriented toward society, but Christianity is oriented toward God. Religious dissent (pluralism) in society is tolerated because it is civil dissent. However, theological dissent (pluralism) in the local assembly cannot be tolerated, because it denies doctrinal and moral boundaries. Neither dissent nor union is a sign of God's presence or blessing. The

sign of God's presence and blessing is "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

## 2. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRUE ASSEMBLY AND MOST ASSEMBLIES?

The only major difference is theory (well-established propositions that have been proved to be factual); however, theory apart from practice increases judgment. If you are not well-established in theory, it is because of one of the following things: (1) You have not applied yourself in the study of Scripture. (2) You are disobedient to the truth you have been taught, which prevents your understanding additional truths. (3) You are incapable of understanding spiritual things.

## 3. WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

It is God's people walking together in obedience to truth with a common goal which results in experiential joy.

## 4. WHAT IS DIVISION?

It is persons in the assembly determined to do something for personal benefit rather than for the benefit of the assembly. Furthermore, it is the alienation of feeling and party strife. Persons who are willfully (intentionally or unreasonably stubborn) ignorant of Biblical principles constitute the greatest problem to the assembly. Division does not come from outside enemies, but it comes from either the assembly's internal carnality or from apostates within the assembly. How can two walk together except they are in agreement?



5. WHAT IS UNITY?

Spiritual unity does not mean the destruction of individual thinking, but it is the molding of our collective Christian thinking within the mind of Christ.

6. WHAT IS THE RESULT OF KNOWING THESE PRINCIPLES AND FAILING TO MAINTAIN THEM?

God will remove the candlestick (lampstand), thus closing the door of opportunity.

7. WHAT CHARACTERIZES CHRIST'S FRIENDS?

Christ said, "You are my friends if you [shall] do what I command you" (John 15:14).

8. WHAT CHARACTERIZES THE UNDERSHEPHERD'S FRIENDS?

Christ's undershepherd says, "You are my friends only as we strive to follow the principles of Scripture."



This concludes Volume III in which we have considered the formation of the King's bride. This series will continue in Volume IV with the next aspect of our study of Christ's future Kingdom.



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