

# Lecture 1 — New Departure.

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*Matt. 16: 1-21, Matt. 18: 15-20.*

## from 'The Church: What is it?'

*Ten lectures on the church of the New Testament seen to be established, endowed, united and free.*

W. T. P. Wolston, M.D., 1905.

### Preface.

The preface of a book is usually the apology for its existence. The Author does not tender one in this case, the occasion for its appearance being far too grave. Scotland has lately been convulsed by a judgment of the House of Lords, which was the result of an appeal to it to decide *Which is the Church?* entitled to certain temporalities.

"The Battle of the Churches" has drawn the eyes of Christendom on the combatants, and in many a mind raised a doubt as to the reality of Christianity, while numbers of the sheep and lambs of Christ's true flock have been flung into distress and perplexity of mind. Under these circumstances it cannot be contended that an inquiry in Scripture as to *What is the Church?* is superfluous.

If the reader suggest that the inquiry might with more propriety have come from another quarter than the pen of an M.D., the Author ventures to reply that he is but walking in the steps of "Luke, the beloved physician," in using his pen in divine things. That God-honoured physician was inspired by the Holy Ghost to write the Gospel which bears his name and also the Acts of the Apostles, from which much in the following pages has been culled.

To inspiration the Author, of course, makes no pretence whatever. At the same time he gladly owns his implicit faith in all the Scriptures as God-breathed, their plenary inspiration being no matter of doubt with him.

His happy work has been to make an appeal, not to the House of Lords, but to the Word of the LORD, which endureth for ever.

"Thus saith the LORD," was the credential of all His messengers in days gone by, and "thus saith the LORD" is, in divine things, the only Court of Appeal today.

W. T. P. W.

46 CHARLOTTE SQUARE,  
EDINBURGH, *December 29, 1904.*

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LECTURE 1.

**A NEW DEPARTURE.**

In touching the subject of the Church, I think it will help us very much if we notice what a complete and perfect change in the ways of God, and in the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, occurs in this sixteenth chapter of Matthew. It is a very common thought in the minds of Christians today, that God's way of dealing with man has been pretty much the same all along the line; that what we have in the Old Testament, in relation to Judaism, affords a certain measure of divine light as to the Church, and that while Christianity gives us a great deal more, it is but a continuation of Judaism.

Now this is a great mistake, and if that thought is in our minds, we shall have to dismiss it, for this reason — that the Old Testament says nothing whatever about the Church. It gives us God's dealings with an earthly people, whereas the Church is heavenly in its nature. Until Christ died and rose again, redemption being accomplished, the veil rent, Christ gone on high as Man, and the Holy Ghost come down, there could not be that which you find the New Testament speaks of as the Church of God — Christ's Assembly. In the chapter before us the Lord announces a most important thing to Peter. There was something He was about to build. Let us

hear His teaching. What we have to do is not to be careful to retain what we may have received from any human source as to this subject, but to see that what we believe we have received from God. God's Word is our only lesson-book, and the sooner we are quit of what is not found in God's Word the better, because it is valueless. We can only grow by the truth, and be formed by the truth, and therefore the importance of the word, "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23: 23). If someone says to me, "You are wrong about the Church," my reply is, "Then set me right, because I want to be right. I want to have the truth, and I take it you do also."

Let us inquire what is the change in the ways of God to which I have referred. The apostle Paul wrote thus: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15: 8). If I understand the meaning of Jesus Christ being "a minister of the circumcision," it is that He was the One who came to fulfil to the Jew the promises made by God to the fathers. Further, He came according to prophecy, and in fulfilment of prophecy. How was He received? We are told, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1: 11). They did not want and would not have Him. That opened the way for God's eternal purpose regarding the Church to come out. Hence that scripture goes on to describe what is known in Christianity — the distinctive blessing of those who believed in Jesus — "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1: 12).

God's principle of action was this, "To the Jew first," and to the Jew the blessed Lord came. The promises made by God to the fathers — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — are often alluded to in Scripture, and are all in relation to Christ, who was the seed of Abraham, the One of whom it is written, "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1: 20). The descendants of Abraham, brought out of Egypt, were put upon redemption ground by the Red Sea — typically the death and resurrection of Christ; then they voluntarily placed themselves under law, only to break it.

The Old Testament gives us the history of the complete testing and thorough breakdown of the first man, no matter where you find him, or his progeny. That was the time of the testing of the first man in responsibility, and began to draw to its close at the moment of which Scripture says, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4: 4).

When man had been tried and tested in every possible way, and, on account of their sin and idolatry, God had been compelled to root out His chosen people Israel from Palestine, and they had been carried captive to Assyria and Babylon (though a remnant somewhat later had been recovered and brought back to Judea), God sent forth His Son. The fulness of the time was when the complete ruin of everything put into man's hands in responsibility was manifest.

Then came the Lord Jesus Christ personally, and He was the last test. Man was tested in innocence, he failed: without law, he was lawless: under law, he was a law-breaker. When God appealed to His people Israel by His prophets — for we read, "I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them" (Jer. 7: 25) — they did not heed them. When John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, came, they "knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed" (Matt. 17: 12).

The last test was in the Person of God's Son, and the effect of that was what makes the Gospel of Matthew so interesting. Christ was the fulfiller of all promise even as He was the subject of prophecy, hence all the Old Testament prophecies relate to Him, and give glowing descriptions of the glory of the kingdom in which He will yet be manifested, and in which there will be blessing for man upon earth. He was the One who should come to fulfil prophecy. He was the Messiah whom God had promised. Hence, to be the fulfilment of the prophecies that announced the full realisation of God's promises, Jesus — His own Son, the Messiah, the King of the Jews — came.

Now notice, please, that the Gospel of Matthew emphatically presents Jesus as the King of the Jews, and they are tested by Christ as such. This accounts for this saying in our chapter, "Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ" (Matt. 16: 20, R.V.). Had that truth come out? It had. Was He the Christ? Undoubtedly. But here He says, Tell them no more that I am the Christ. Why this remarkable charge? Because all the proofs given of His Messiahship had been in vain to the nation. If you read it carefully you will find Matthew's Gospel incontestably gives you the continuous presentation of Christ to the Jews as their King, their Messiah, their Head, with all the necessary proofs of the glory of His Person, and His title to the throne of David.

A glance at the chapters which precede the sixteenth, which I have read to you, will make this plain. Matthew 1 gives us His genealogy as Son of "David *the king*" (ver. 6), and demonstrates His indefeasible title to the throne of David. In Matthew 2 the wise men of the East came to Jerusalem inquiring, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" As a result His life is sought, and He is taken to Egypt, to fulfil Scripture (ver. 15). In Matthew 3 He comes back to Galilee, and at the end of those wonderful thirty years of private life, of deep interest to the spiritual mind, but of which God has told us little, He emerges, comes to John to be baptized, and he baptized Him. What is the result? Praying at His baptism, the heavens are opened, the Spirit like a dove descends upon this blessed Man, and the Father's voice is heard declaring, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (vers. 16, 17). The Baptist heard and saw this, and his testimony, as recorded by John the Evangelist, is: "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1: 33). The Baptist's clarion voice, that had already rung throughout Israel, charged on them their sins, and roused multitudes to repentance, had from that moment a sweeter tale to tell, viz., This is the Son of God, fulfiller of prophecy, and promise likewise, and He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

Long before John's day, God, by the pen of David, had written: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed . . . yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. 2: 2, 6, 7). When was that fulfilled? At His incarnation, when He came into the world. In the day of His birth He is owned by God as His Son, in fulfilment of Psalm 2, and in the day of His baptism He is announced to be such from the opened heavens by the Father's voice. But the Jews did not *hear* the Father nor *see* Jesus at Jordan, and, alas, they did not *believe* that the Scriptures which so plainly marked Him out to be the Son of God found their answer and fulfilment in Him. They were not, however,

incredulous about the Old Testament in that day. It is very strange how incredulous men are in this day. Are you incredulous? If you are, I pity you — you are missing a great deal. At Jordan, the Father announces the glorious fact that the lowly praying Man whom John baptized was His beloved Son, in whom was all His delight, and John the Baptist passed on the word, which Peter by his confession and others bring out later.

Then in Matthew 4 we have the Temptation in the wilderness. He who was the true King, ere He goes out into the scene of man's misery and sin to deliver him, defeats the usurper, Satan. He becomes the moral victor of the enemy, by never departing from the place He had taken of dependence and obedience, as Man. Thereafter we have a summary of the wonderful deeds He did (see vers. 23, 24) — miracles which proved Him to be the Messiah of whom Isaiah spoke (Isa. 35). Then in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, we find in Matthew 5, 6, 7, what are manifestly the laws of His kingdom — the principles which should characterise those who enter it.

Matthew 8 and 9 bring together twelve remarkable miracles, which declare the powers of His kingdom, and reveal the loving and tender heart of the King, attesting His Messiahship to the uttermost. In Matthew 10 He sent His disciples out to preach the kingdom. Was their testimony believed? Alas, no! for Matthew 11 records that the places where His mightiest works were done repented not; and then all the deeper glories of His Person come out, when rejected upon the line of earthly promise in which He had been presented to Israel.

Matthew 12 records that "the Pharisees went out and held a council against him, how they might destroy him" (ver. 14), and accuse Him of being in league with Satan. The nation utterly rejected their Messiah at this point, and He consequently rejects them. This is figuratively taught as He got into a boat, pushed off from the shore, and taught the wonderful lessons of Matthew 13. The seven parables there unfolded bring in the idea of an entirely new departure and manner of activity on God's part. The law addressed itself to man as though God had hitherto been seeking to get something from man. He got nothing. Now, that day was over, and there was to be a new kind of ministry altogether — God was going to put something into man, instead of trying to get something out of him, which was the principle of law — "A sower went forth to sow." Further, "the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven" take the place of the kingdom in *manifestation*. This last is deferred to a day of glory yet to come.

In Matthew 14 John the Baptist is beheaded, and in Matthew 15, which is full of deep significance before Matthew 16, the whole state of man in the flesh is judged, whether on the religious side of it as presented in the leaders of the nation, or in its purely natural state (vers. 16-20). The Pharisees and Sadducees were the leaders of religious ideas and thought, and what the Lord said about them we do well to heed in our day. They might be and doubtless were outwardly very sanctimonious, but they were opposing God's work and God's Son, hence the Lord says, "Let them alone." A Pharisee was one who went in for ritualism, and the improvement of the flesh. The Sadducee was a rationalist, who denied revelation and a future state. We are surrounded by both these principles now. Each equally hated Christ, for He exposed both. The truth is never palatable to man, because it cuts up and exposes him. It shows man wherein he is wrong, and he does not like that. The Pharisees did not like the Lord's assertion that the hypocrisy of forms had been substituted for truth in the inward parts, and that

man's heart — spite of his use of legal religion — was the source of evil only. At this they were greatly "offended" (ver. 12), and His disciples told Him so. "But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (ver. 13). What is not of God cannot stand. Then follows the injunction: "*Let them alone*: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (ver. 14).

There is a great principle here, in "let them alone." Now mark — if you have a blind leader, and you are blind yourself, the ditch is the only end of your road. Christianity, however, is not the blind leading the blind; nor the seeing leading the blind; but the seeing leading the seeing. God delights to give us light that we may see His things, but for their enjoyment and; — profitable use all depends upon our subjection to Christ, to the Holy Ghost, and to the Scriptures. God makes very little of man, whether you, me, or any other. And the more man is out of sight in divine things the better — he is very often in the way. What Christians have to do in the present day of Church crisis and Church difficulty is to take their eyes off every man, and every system man has set up, and seek to learn what God says about His Church in His Word. I believe that today God would turn His people back again to the Holy Scriptures for light and guidance as to the Church. I came over the Tweed more than forty years ago, and there is a marked and very sorrowful difference in the way Scripture is regarded now and then. At that time it was generally believed and revered. Now it is almost universally disregarded and set aside; and what I desire that we should do is to turn more reverently, really, and truly to the Scriptures — the only source of real light for man here — to learn God's mind regarding that Church which He calls His.

Having instructed His disciples in Matthew 15 as regards the leaders, viz., to "*let them alone*," you find that the Lord Himself in Matthew 16 "*left them and departed*" (ver. 4), a significant expression of what was to happen to Israel. But the judgment goes deeper, even to the total setting aside of man in the flesh, his heart being only the corrupt spring of every form of evil. At this point the Lord gives up the Jewish nation, in the person of their leaders. It was at that moment that "the Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven" (Matt. 16: 1). He replied that they could understand the weather, but not God's ways, and then added: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 16: 4). What was that? It was the death and resurrection of Christ as the only sign that could be added to the marvellous one that had been given them in Immanuel, the Virgin's Son, to which they were totally blind, else they had not asked for a sign from heaven.

"And he left them, and departed" (ver. 4), is what inaugurates the totally new ministry of Christ, as now He leaves Judea and goes to Caesarea Philippi. This town — now known as Baneas — was outside the limits of the land of Israel, situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, and close to the most easterly source of the river Jordan; and must not be confounded with Caesarea the Roman seaport capital of Palestine, where the gospel first reached the Gentiles (Acts 10). On Gentile ground Jesus puts the most serious question that can be presented to any human heart, that is, Whom men in general said that He was. The Jew had failed to see that He was the Messiah, and the day was over for the Jew. But was He not still the minister of the circumcision? Yes, but the circumcision would not have Him, the nation was about to refuse Him, and prefer a robber and murderer to Himself. Hence He breaks with Judaism, and brings out the wonderful truth that we have in the latter part of the sixteenth chapter.

Just then it was that "he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (ver. 13). It was in principle, "What think ye of Christ?" What was the effect produced upon the hearts of men by what had been manifested in that blessed One? No proof was wanting of who He was. They had been furnished with plenty of opportunity to know who He was; John the Baptist had declared Him, and His own mighty works had borne witness of Him, and the Father Himself had done so also. We read (Luke 8: 1) that He went "throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." There was not a hamlet where the blessed feet of the Son of God did not carry Him in grace, to tell out to men the heart of God; and to deliver from every form of the oppression of Satan's power. But the end was really this — We do not know who He is. Some said He was John the Baptist, risen from the dead; some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets; it little mattered which. These were simply the guesses of profound moral indifference. All was a matter of opinion, not faith, resulting in that careless uncertainty which always marks the soul that has no sense of need. Where need exists in the soul, no rest is found till Christ is really known. The Pharisees and Sadducees were hostile to Him, and the mass of the nation were heartlessly indifferent.

To the little group of disciples His grace had gathered around Him He then says, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, to whom the Father had revealed His Son, furnishes the answer of faith. He now apprehended Him to be much more than the Messiah, the fulfiller of promise and prophecy, and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the *living* God" (ver. 16). Full, blessed confession, in which was no uncertainty of mere human opinion, but the result of the revelation to his soul of the Person of Christ, which the Father had been pleased to make to him, as the Son of God in a power of life superior to death.

On a previous occasion when many went away, and walked no more with Him, "Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? THOU HAST the words of eternal life. And WE BELIEVE and ARE SURE that thou art THE HOLY ONE OF GOD" (see R.V., John 6: 67, 69). That was a fine confession of Peter's; and the man that confesses Christ according to the light he has will get more. Peter got more. In John 6 he says, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," and "Thou art the Holy One of God." He saw in measure what He was and what He had. What He is forms the immovable resting-place of our souls as we repose in Him and His work. What He has becomes the everlasting supply to our souls in their manifold needs. You get into your hearts those blessed words, "Thou hast," and "Thou art," and all the need of your soul will find its full answer in Christ, for He loves to minister what He is and what He has to the longing heart.

Peter gets a distinct advance here. It is not merely that Christ was the fulfiller of the second Psalm, which Nathanael confessed when he said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1: 49); and Martha too acknowledged when she said, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11: 27). There were souls here and there that had the sense that He was God's blessed Son; but Peter goes further, as he confesses, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of *the living* God." He owns Him to be the Son of Him in whom is life and life-giving power. The life of God cannot be destroyed, and the Son of the *living* God cannot be overcome. In Him is that power of life which nothing can vanquish. Satan had the power of death; the Son of God has the power of life. The unchangeable power of life, even though He go into death, cannot be overcome of death. It is the very reverse. He annuls

death. Every other man was overcome of death; the Son of the *living* God could not be. It is well to notice here the force of "living," because He speaks of death, and "the gates of hades," which refer to Satan's kingdom. That Assembly which is founded on the unchanging power of life in the Son of God cannot be affected by the kingdom of death. Glorious truth!

Now mark the four things which the Lord brings out — four deeply important things. The first thing is the revelation made by the Father to Peter of who Jesus was; second, the new name again given to Simon by Jesus, who by his confession of faith in the Person of the Son of the *living* God was thereby manifested to be a stone of the building Christ was about to build on the foundation revealed in what the Father taught Peter; third, the announcement never made before that "upon this rock *I will build* my church," — the Assembly yet to be built by Himself on the foundation of His own Person, acknowledged by faith to be "the Son of the *living* God," and known as such in resurrection; and fourth, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" which He would give to Peter, *i.e.*, authority of administration in the kingdom on earth, in His name. And here let me say, we must be careful not to confound the kingdom with the Church; they are two distinct things. The first is one of the dispensations of time and the last of them, the latter is not. The Church is a heavenly structure, though formed on earth. The kingdom is an earthly dispensation, though ruled from heaven, because the King is there now.

How did Peter get this wonderful revelation? I think he had been to college — not a college that man instituted. It was the Father's College. He had been taught by the Father. The Father, in His favour to Peter, taught him that the blessed, lowly, gracious Man whom he was following was His Son — the eternal Son become a Man, that the Father might be revealed in Him. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11: 27). There are inscrutable depths of glory in the Person of Christ that no human mind can fathom, but what we cannot fathom, we can enjoy. Without doubt it is the inscrutability of the glory of His Person that is the guarantee of faith of the divinity of Jesus — divinity which His self-renunciation — in emptying Himself and assuming humanity — might have hidden from the eyes of unbelief. But can you not understand, now that it is revealed, God's Son becoming a Man, to bring out according to all that was in His heart, the heart of God to you, and to bring you to God, and into the apprehension and enjoyment of so great a love?

Carefully note that to know Christ personally as He has been revealed is the basis of all blessing to the soul, and paves the way to deeper enjoyment of God's mind. Here the Lord says, Peter, My Father has told you who I am; now I will tell you what you are. The Father had spoken to Peter, and now the Son in His own right speaks. "And I also say" (R.V.) — not "And I say also," invert those words: He has somewhat of deepest moment to say to Peter — "I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my assembly; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (ver. 18). The Greek word *ekklesia* here translated "church" in our version, meant originally *an assembly of the citizens of any particular state*. The word as used by the Lord — "MY ASSEMBLY" gives it a unique character; and marks it off from every other assembly. It is the Assembly viewed in the character of a house — not a place as men now use the term generally. And what was Peter? A stone. And what is a stone? A bit of a rock. Every Christian by faith in Christ, the living stone, is a stone, a bit of the rock.

Peter, you see, gets his new name confirmed here. When he was at first brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew, the Lord said to him, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called *Cephas* (Peter), which is by interpretation, *A stone*" (*John* 1: 42). If the rock has a certain nature, a certain character, so has the stone which is a bit of it. It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian; he is identified by life and nature with Christ. He belongs to Christ, he is the subject of the Father's love and favour, and of the Son's salvation, and there has been a work wrought in him that nobody has wrought but Christ.

You will remember how beautifully Peter takes up and applies this thought, when he says, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom coming, as unto a *living stone*, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 3-5). Who are these living stones? All true believers in Christ. What was personal to Peter in Matthew 16 he passes on, to all who have come to Christ, in the epistle. Are all professing Christians such? Oh no. Profession is one thing; possession is quite another. I expect you are a professing Christian; but whether you are a *living stone* is another thing altogether. Peter, by faith in Christ, had come to have part in Christ. The Lord had quickened him, and now He quickens us. To all true believers in Himself, who come to Him, tasting that He is gracious — and oh, how gracious He is — He imparts His own life, and thus they become living stones — like Peter.

We get the illustration and earliest anticipative expression of this glorious truth in the twentieth of John. There the Lord came into the upper room, where the apostles and other believers were gathered together, and "breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (ver. 22). As the last Adam alive from the dead, He breathed on them — recalling the action of God with the first Adam, in creation — and then brought them into life in a new condition, *i.e.*, that of the risen Christ — His own risen life. He had already said to Mary, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (ver. 17), Christianity is this — Christ risen from the dead, taking into association with Himself, all that are His own, and putting them one and all into the place that He now takes before God, as Man, risen from among the dead. His Assembly, those that are now His, are spoken of under four different figures in the New Testament — a House, a Body, a Candlestick, and a Bride, as we shall see later.

Let us consider a little more what He says to Peter in Matthew 16: "Upon this rock I will build my church." Now, what was the rock? Was it Peter? We have been told so, but you do not believe it, do you? Do you think Peter was the rock? A shifting sort of rock poor Peter would have made. He was a stone, and sometimes rather like a rolling stone too. And have not you found yourself to be like a rolling stone sometimes? Undoubtedly the rock was Christ. The confession of His name, by faith in His Person, as Son of the living God is all important. It is His Person that is here contemplated as set forth in resurrection, for on this glory of His Person all is founded.

Resurrection is the proof that He is the Son of the living God. We read, that He is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1: 4). He was the Son of God before He died; He was declared to be the Son of God

by resurrection. He was the only man ever taken out from among the dead; but God has taken Him out, and He is alive today at God's right hand. He is proved to be the Son of God, with power over all the domain of death, by resurrection, and it is upon this Christ builds His Assembly. Observe carefully the Lord's words: "Upon this rock I will build my assembly" not "I have built," nor "I am building"; it was a future work, necessarily connected with His death and resurrection, which brought to nought the power He speaks of as "the gates of hades." "My assembly" is a beautiful word. People usually think of a church as composed of stone and lime, that which the eye can see, but "the assembly" in Scripture carries quite a different idea, being Christ's redeemed people, born of the Spirit, washed in His blood, and sealed by the Holy Ghost. It is made of stones; and what is the cementing, the uniting bond? The Holy Ghost. And what kind of stones are they? Living stones. And who made them living stones, and built them in? Jesus. Man is not the builder here. Peter did not build the Church — he did administer the kingdom. You must keep distinct the difference between what Christ builds, and what man builds in responsibility. That may or may not be good building, and what is worthless will disappear in the fire (see 1 Cor. 3). What Christ builds can never be destroyed, undermined, or overthrown, "and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." What are "the gates of hades"? All the power of Satan — that is the idea. It is a figurative expression.

Satan had the power of death, but in the cross of Christ not only was redemption accomplished, the claims of God met, and the blood shed that would blot out sin, so that we could be righteously justified before God; but there is also the absolute annulling of the power of Satan. Christ went down into death — the very citadel of Satan's power — overcame him, and left the stronghold of the enemy without strength, i.e., He burst "the gates of hades," annulled death, and broke the power of the tomb. God raised Him from the dead, and today He is a risen, victorious Christ; and upon this rock of the unchangeable power of life in Him the Assembly is built. If you be a part of what He calls "My assembly," no power of Satan will ever be able to dislodge, undermine, or upset you.

There are two other scriptures I will now allude to, as to the Church, where the Builder is manifestly divine. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, You "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2: 20). In his day the work was going on, but who built? Paul? No. The apostles? No. Why? Because they were stones — if foundation stones — in the building, not builders; stones do not build themselves in. The apostle says, Ye are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" — they were connected with the foundation. In Matthew 16 it is Christ building; and in Ephesians 2: 20 the work of building is equally divine — no man has any hand in it. We read of Paul as a masterbuilder in 1 Corinthians 3, but you must not confound Christ's building with what man builds. It is the mixing up of the two that has brought in all the confusion and false doctrine which we see today, culminating in the confessional and the blasphemy of man being able to forgive sins. We must not mingle the things that differ.

Again, we read from the pen of Peter: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 3-5). The work is still going on, it is not finished yet. Christ had not begun it when He spoke to Peter. He began it after

He rose from the dead, and ascended on high; and when the Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost, His Assembly began to be built. His work is still going on, hence Peter says, "You are being built up," and it is a very blessed thing to find yourself a stone in a building which the Lord has built. Such being the case, you can rejoice in the fact that Satan has no pick-axe that can pick you out.

Here then we find that not only Christ builds the Assembly, the foundation of which is the revelation of His name, but that its origin is divine — it is purely a divine work. All this is confirmed if we look now at Revelation 21, where we see the Church as "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven" (ver. 2). The Church of God belongs to heaven. In its nature, origin, character, and destiny — yea, its absolute being before God — it is heavenly. The city comes down out of heaven from God. Its origin is from God, and its nature is heavenly; and it is a great thing for every Christian to see that he is heavenly — he belongs to heaven.

Now for a little let us look at the kingdom, and seek to understand what the Lord means, as He says to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16: 19). Did Christ give Peter the keys of heaven? Impossible. Men have painted pictures of the Lord and His apostles, and Peter with keys hanging at his girdle, while a flock of sheep surrounds them. Hence many people think that Peter has the keys of the Church. There are none such. This is a pure fallacy. Sheep are not fed by keys, and Christ does not build with keys. The important truth which the Lord taught has not been seized. The value of keys is to open doors, and when the doors are opened the keys are of no more use. It was a privilege Peter received of the Lord, a great favour — he was to be the administrator of the kingdom of heaven. The King has been refused, and before the King comes back again, and the kingdom is set up (as it will be in the millennial reign), the whole of the truth of the Church is brought out — the Assembly is built. Peter, as the servant, is used of the Lord in the preaching of the gospel, and he administers that which is connected with the kingdom. Christ the King is in heaven, and He can administer things down here by a special servant, or by His Church, which was to occupy Christ's place on earth. Hence we read elsewhere: "Tell it unto the assembly; but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18: 17, 18). The Assembly is to act for and in Christ's name during His absence — the only successor, known to Scripture, of the authority committed to Peter in Matthew 16, but note, in a different sphere. It is the Church in this passage, not the kingdom of heaven it applies to, but neither Peter nor the Church can bind things in heaven, though what they bound on earth heaven would ratify.

Peter has nothing to do with letting people into heaven. Christ has the keys of heaven, be sure of that. Hear His words: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and hades" (Rev. 1: 18). He keeps those keys, but in His service down here He may and did use Peter, and put into his hands two keys wherewith to administer the kingdom of heaven. Why not one key? He had to open two doors. In Acts 2, where he preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he put one key into the Jewish door, and opened the way for them to get blessing. The name of that key was "Repentance," I incline

to think. In Acts 10 he went down to Caesarea and opened the door to the Gentiles, and the name of that key was "Believe." The Jew was called to *repentance*, and to clear himself from his nation now guilty of the murder of their Messiah. To the Gentile, that had no link with, and no claim on God, Peter says, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever *believeth* in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10: 43).

Remission of sins, and the reception of the Holy Spirit, so as to form part of the Assembly of God, is a divine work; man has no hand in it. It is Christ's work, and will stand. Of the thirteen hundred different sects or so-called churches in Christendom which man has built it may be safely affirmed that not one of them is *the* Church of God. They are all human systems which, after different man-conceived patterns men have built. Very possibly many true Christians may be found in each one of them, but they fail to represent the scriptural thought of "My assembly," which embraces all that are Christ's at any time on the earth, till He comes, or the aggregate of all called out in this special epoch when He comes. But you and I are now concerned about what Christ builds, and where we are in relation to that building should exercise our hearts. Let us then be like the Bereans of whom it is written: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and *searched the Scriptures daily*, whether these things were so." (Acts 17: 11).