

Ephesians 2:11-22 (William T. Trotter) 60014

Eight Lectures on Prophecy, Distinct Calling and Glory of the Church as Bride and Co-Heir of Christ, The

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Read Eph. 2:11;3:19

I feel that nothing could more appropriately -I- introduce to our attention the subject which is to occupy us this evening than the few verses which have now been read. We see in those verses that the calling of the Church is not only distinguished from all that existed prior to itself, but also from all that had been revealed to the prophets of Old-Testament times as to what was yet to be the manifested glory of Christ, in connection with Israel on the earth, in the millennial reign. Look again to what the apostle says, chap. 3 ver. 4, 5: "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." And as to how the apostle had become acquainted with this mystery, he tells us plainly enough, " how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words " (ver. 3). There was a mystery revealed to Paul, made known to him by revelation from God, which had not been made known in former ages, as now in Paul's day it was made known,—revealed to Christ's holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Now, it is to this mystery, the distinct calling and glory of the Church,—for it is here we shall find this mystery developed,—that our attention is to be directed this evening.

One thing I feel to be important at the outset; that is, to define the principal term employed in the announcement of our subject. You may suppose that the expression "the Church" is so commonly used, and so generally understood, as not to need defining. But the fact is, there is hardly an expression as to the meaning of which people's thoughts are so vague and indefinite. Some apply the term to the building in which professing Christians meet for worship. And, even among those too well instructed for this, it is still far from being distinctly understood. It is either applied to any religious association with which men happen by birth or conversion, or other circumstances, to be connected; or it is understood to mean the aggregate of all such associations the whole world over; or, in a still wider sense, it is considered as including all true believers of all ages, from Abel down to the last person who shall be saved. Now, it is well to remember that it is only in the New Testament we find the word; and this of itself might suggest the inquiry, whether that which it denotes be not peculiar to New-Testament times. In former ages, as all Christians understand, there were individual believers; such as Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and all those spoken of in Heb. 11, whether their names be mentioned there, or included among those of whom the apostle says, " The time would fail me to tell of them." Besides this, there was one nation which God had outwardly separated to himself as his people. The vast majority of that nation were, however, in every period of their history, unconverted. There were individual saints not gathered together in a body; and there was a nation, a body of people in that sense, outwardly owned of God: but the mass of them were never God's people in truth, but stiff-necked and hard-hearted adversaries of God. Now, the Church of God is God's assembly. The word rendered " church " is derived from one which means to call out, and is used of any assembly of persons called out from among others for any purpose whatever. But the use of the word in the New Testament is what must determine its meaning there; and there it is applied either to the assembly of all believers from Pentecost to the coming of Christ into the air to receive his saints to himself in glory, or to the assembly of all believers alive upon the earth at any given time between these two epochs,—or to the assembly of all the believers in any given locality; as, for instance, the Church at Jerusalem, Antioch, or Ephesus, and even " the Church in thy house." There are but two instances in the New Testament in which the word "church" is used in any other sense or application than these. In Acts 7:38, it is applied to the assembly of the Israelites in the wilderness; and, in Acts 19:32 and 39, the same word in the original is translated "assembly," not church. But it is the same word; and there it is used of the assembly of Ephesian idolaters and others. With these exceptions, which hardly could be confounded with our present subject, the word " church " will be found in the New Testament to mean either (1) all believers from Pentecost to the taking up of the saints at the coming of Christ; or (2) all believers at any one time upon earth, during the period between these; or (3) all the believers in any given locality, c. r assembling as such in any given place. I do not stop here to prove that such is the use of the word in the New Testament. Many considerations will present themselves in proof of it in the course of our evening's inquiry into Scripture on this subject; and I would entreat you to give to the subject the most diligent examination afterward, when you have leisure to do so. But it is important, when we speak of the distinct calling and glory of the Church, that we should have clearly before our minds who they are that form the Church, to which this distinct calling and glory belong. And it is evidently in the widest application of the term—that is, as including all true believers from Pentecost to the taking up of the saints—that we use it in our present inquiry. Both the other uses of it are included within this.

When we speak of the distinct calling and glory of the Church, it evidently brings in view some other body or bodies, from whose calling and glory that of the Church is distinguished. And what is it that has been occupying our attention for the last two evenings? It is the prophetic testimony of God as to Israel and the other nations of the earth in millennial times. We have been studying the gracious promises of our God as to the restoration of the nation of Israel, and the blessing of all nations in subordination to them, under the reign of Christ. But, when we speak of the distinct calling and glory of the Church, we mean that " the Church " is called to a higher glory than will belong to Israel or to the nations. These will doubtless be happy under the reign of Christ; and that reign will bring fuller and higher blessing to Israel than to the other nations, who will really be subordinate to Israel: but " the Church " will be manifested as the bride—the heavenly bride—of Jesus when he reigns,—not blest under his sway, but sharing his dominion and glory; and sharing it, moreover, in the character of his bride.

That we may the more clearly discern the difference between the calling of the Church and that of Israel, let us look a little further at what Scripture reveals as to the latter. It is only that we may better see the contrast between them. In Deut. 28 we have the blessings promised to Israel in case of their obedience. They have entirely failed in obedience, as we know, and have thus forfeited all those blessings. But, as we have seen so largely in Scripture, they are to be brought back. Grace will re-instate them in all their forfeited blessings; and they will be maintained in the enjoyment of these blessings by the righteous rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what are these blessings? "And it shall

come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth." You see, it is one nation in contrast with, and exalted above, all other nations. " And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.... The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." What have we here but a fullness of earthly blessings, by which this one nation was to be distinguished from, and set above, all others? The effect which was to have followed is stated also. " And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee." Abundant and continual prosperity in earthly, temporal things, was what all nations could understand; and this they were to have seen in Israel, had Israel been obedient; and by this they were to have seen that Israel was called by the Lord's name. "And the Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand; and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath: if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them." How manifestly, then, was Israel's calling a calling to pre-eminence and glory and power and plenty and prosperity and blessedness on the earth. And though through disobedience they have entirely forfeited these their promised blessings; and though when they are restored, as they surely will be, it will be entirely of grace,—this will not have changed their calling, and the character of their blessing. They will inherit spiritual blessings, it is true,—forgiveness, regeneration, the saving knowledge of Christ; but they will enjoy these spiritual blessings, not in heavenly, but in earthly places. And the fullness of earthly blessing will still be the distinctive mark of their calling. All the prophecies of their restoration, and subsequent happiness and prosperity, prove this. One only I will quote in addition to those already cited in former lectures: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof: they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God " (Amos 9:13-15). How beautiful are these words! And yet how evidently do they promise to restore Israel's temporal blessings in earthly places! These will be enjoyed by them, it is true, as God's people; they will have become such then in reality, in truth. They will have been born again; for there is no entrance into the kingdom, even as to its earthly department, but by being born again. But there is an earthly department, as well as a heavenly; and the chief place, and richest blessings, in the earthly department, are promised to restored and repentant Israel.

I say the chief place; for nothing can be more clear than that, in the millennial reign, the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles will exist in full force, and the pre-eminent place on earth belong to Israel. Why should " ten men take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you,"—unless God be with them in a sense different from that in which he will be with the other nations of the earth? (See Zech. 8:22,23.) The following beautiful passages from Isa. 60 are very clear as to this point: To Zion, to Jerusalem, it is said, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee." God will then have glorified Jerusalem, and its glory will thus be acknowledged by all. "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Surely the mere reading of these passages is enough to show that it cannot be the present dispensation that they treat. One of the most common and familiar thoughts connected with Christianity is, as we all know, that in it all distinction between Jew and Gentile has ceased, -has passed away; that in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ is all and in all " (Col. 3:11). But these prophecies treat of a period when the distinction between Jew and Gentile, between Israel and the other nations of the earth, will be as fully recognized as it ever was, and when Israel shall occupy the place of full pre-eminence on the earth. " And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen, and your vinedressers. But ye (restored Israel, the citizens of Jerusalem, the city of the great King) shall be named the priests of the Lord. Men shall call you the ministers of our God. Ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. 61:4-6). Can anything more plainly demonstrate the superiority of the Jew over the Gentile in millennial times?

But now, my brethren, I am reminded of what some one has most justly said,—that " Christ is the great purpose of God." This is, in other words, what Peter says: "Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." The entire sum of prophecy is here stated,—the sufferings of Christ and the glories (for it is glories in the original) that should follow. It is only as you see this, and bear it in mind, that you can profitably consider these details of prophetic inquiry. This is the only point from which the details of prophetic truth can be rightly surveyed. You can hardly have a correct, and are sure to have a contracted, view of the landscape, if you are but a little elevated above the plain. It is from the higher ground that you are enabled to descry the length and breadth of the glorious prospect; and the nearer you approach to the point of moral survey occupied by the blessed One who drew the picture, and whose office is to glorify Christ, the more you will find that your view has been distorted, as well as curtailed, by occupying any lower position. God's own glory in Christ is his great object; and it is as we bear this in mind, and view everything in connection with this, that we shall receive a correct understanding of God's blessed purposes and ways.

Glory may be said to be the manifestation of excellency. Gold is precious, even in the ore. But the glory of it is not discerned till it has passed through the crucible, and been separated from all the baser elements which were mingled with it. The sun is the fountain of light and heat to this whole system, even when clouds interpose, and obscure its brightness; but when the clouds have passed away, and it shines forth in all its majesty and strength, then we see its glory. And whatever may constitute, in millennial times, the manifested glories of Christ, they will all be found to be but the display of what he is now, and of what faith now knows him to be. It is only by faith that we can discern these glories now; but it will surely be found that each glory to be manifested then is but the display of some excellence residing in this blessed person, or

in one or other of the offices he sustains. How the heart stops short, alas of entering by faith into the contemplation of these wondrous and varied glories of Christ! Would that we knew them better by the teaching of the Comforter, whose office it is to glorify Christ, by taking of his, and showing it unto us!

We have been seeing, both to-night and on former occasions, how Christ will "reign in Mount Zion and before his ancients gloriously." In what character does he possess this glory which will then be displayed? It is as the Son of David. Faith knows him to be the Son of David now, -the One of whom it was said by the angel to his virgin mother, " He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33). What do we understand by this? A person once told me seriously, that his idea of those who held pre-millennial views was, that we believed the identical chair of state in which David sat—his literal throne—to be still somewhere in existence, and that in the millennium it would be occupied by Christ! I should not have ventured even to seem to trifle with the subject, and with your feelings, by repeating such a statement as this, had it not been made to me by an intelligent person, a minister of Christ. One need not, of course, disclaim such a thought. But, if they be such ideas of pre-millennial doctrines as these that lead our brethren to reject them; if this be what they understand by the personal reign, denouncing it, as they do, as a carnal expectation, -why, then, on the one hand, we cannot be surprised at their opposition; while, on the other, it is to be regretted that they take no better pains to inform themselves what pre-millennial doctrines are. This only would I ask them,—What do they mean when they speak of "the throne of the Caesars"? How would any one understand the assertion that Louis Napoleon now occupies "the throne of the Bourbons and of Charlemagne"? Need we to explain to people that this means that he wields the authority once possessed by the Bourbons?- that he reigns over the country once ruled by Charlemagne? And what is meant in Scripture (for it is Scripture language, not ours) by Christ sitting on the throne of David? Surely it means that he is to exercise the authority once entrusted to David; that he is to rule over the nations of which David was king and lord. He is "of the seed of David according to the flesh." He was born "King of the Jews." And where Peter, speaking of the resurrection of Christ, quotes from David's words in Psa. 16, he thus explains them: " Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ," &c. (Acts 2:30,31). So far from the death and resurrection of Christ setting aside his title and his claims as the Son of David, it was in resurrection that this title was to be verified, these claims fulfilled.

But Christ has higher glories than that of being David's royal Son and Heir. He is the seed of Abraham; and there were promises to Abraham of wider scope than those which were made to David. It was promised to Abraham "that he should be the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). We surely know who the seed of Abraham is. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ " (Gal. 3:16). As the seed of David, he is to inherit David's royal dominion; but, as the seed of Abraham, all nations, yea, all the families of the earth, are to be blessed in him.

But Christ has higher glories yet. He is the Son of man, the second Adam; and, as such, he inherits all the dominion entrusted to the first Adam, but forfeited by his sin. " And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth " (Gen. 1:26). Such was the dominion over this whole lower creation which was confided to the first Adam. By his sin, as we all know, this was forfeited. But was it lost, never to be regained? No: to man it was entrusted, and by man shall it yet be exercised in full blessedness and glory. One of the Psalms takes up this point, as you will remember, bringing in the fact that there is a "Son of man" to whom this place of universal power and authority pertains. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field: the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea." And then, as marking the period in which this prophecy will have its fulfillment, the Psalm ends as it begins, with "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name IN ALL THE EARTH " (Psa. 8:4-9). In Heb. 2 we have this very passage quoted by the apostle, and applied to our blessed Lord. "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak" (ver. 5). By the expression "world to come," most people understand the state of disembodied spirits after death. But there is no such thought as this in the passage. It is literally, as all scholars agree, "the habitable earth to come." In the coming age, or dispensation, the earth is not put in subjection to angels, but to man. "But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man," &c., -the passage just quoted from the eighth Psalm. "But now," says the apostle, "we see not yet all things put under him" (ver. 8). It is the purpose of God that all things shall be; but we see not yet the accomplishment thereof. But what do we see? "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor: that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (ver. 9). Part of the divine purpose is fulfilled. Jesus is personally crowned with glory and honor; but he awaits, at the right hand of God, the arrival of the time when all things shall be subjected to his sway. He is yet to inherit, as the second Adam, all the glory of the dominion entrusted to the first, but forfeited by his fall.

But, while it is as Son of man he inherits all this glory, it is as the rejected Son of man, as having died and risen again, that he actually takes it. This accounts for the passage just quoted going so far beyond Psa. 8 We do indeed read there, "Who hast set thy glory above the heavens;" but here we find the Son of man himself in heaven, crowned with glory and honor.

There are deeper wonders, too, of his blessed person disclosed in connection with all this. Christ has a higher glory than any we have been contemplating. He is more than the Son of David, more than the Son of Abraham, more than the Son of man. He is the Son of God,—the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. We shall see directly that the very first mention of "the Church" in Scripture is connected with the confession of this highest, divine, essential glory residing in the person of Christ as Son of God. But surely we need to remember here that we tread on holy ground. Turn to Phil. 2:6-11, where we read of Christ Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." What follows? The announcement that he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." First, as God, he humbled himself to become man. Then, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself still lower, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. What ensues? "Wherefore "—because of his having thus humbled himself—" God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Now, here is a glory conferred on Christ which surpasses all that we have been glancing at. And it is

to him, in this highest place of given glory, that the Church is united. You will not mistake me. I am not affirming that we are associated with his essential Godhead glory. To affirm that would be blasphemy. Such glory he can share with no one. "He gives not," in this sense, "his glory to another." Nor am I affirming that we shall participate in receiving the adoration to be rendered by every knee to that blessed name,—the name of JESUS." No: but yet it is to him as in this his highest place of given glory,—the glory conferred on him, not as the Son of David, not as the Son of Abraham, nor simply as the Son of man, but as the One who, being God, the Son of the Father, humbled himself to become the Son of man; and not only so, but to become obedient unto death, the death of the cross,—it is to him, in the place of glory conferred upon him as the reward of this his wondrous, infinite condescension, that the Church is united. She is associated with him thus as head, sovereign, ruler over all things. Turn to Eph. 1, where the apostle prays for the Ephesian believers to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, "that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things TO THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." The Church is the body, the fullness of him whom God has thus raised from the dead, and set at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all powers, all things being put under his feet. And, as his body, the Church is associated with him in this place of wondrous, highest glory. God "gave him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is his body." The One who went down into the dust of death, having first stooped from the throne of the Eternal to become man, that he might go down into death, is the One whom God has raised from the dead to put all things under his feet,—all things in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth. And God has thus given him to be Head over all things " to the Church." It is not here that he is Head of the Church. That is true likewise, blessed be God! But here he is presented as " head over all things to the Church, which is his body." His body, the Church, is thus associated with his glory in this headship over all things.

Let us now turn to John 17. You will observe, that, in this chapter, our Lord is praying to the Father as the One who had come forth from the Father, and could speak of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. But he had veiled that glory in flesh and blood; and, in the human nature which he had thus assumed, he had glorified the Father on the earth. He is here in spirit beyond the cross; for he speaks of having finished the work which his Father had given him to do. He prays for his disciples; and not for them only, but for all who should believe on him through their word. So that the prayer of Jesus embraces us, my brethren, as much as the disciples of that day. It is surely through their word we have believed on Jesus. Well, for all such Jesus prays, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Now mark the next words: "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me; and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. "There is a glory which the Father has given to Jesus, and which Jesus has given to the Church. By this glory, which the Church thus shares with Jesus, the world is to know in millennial times that the Father has loved the Church even as he loves his own Son. When the world shall see the Church in the same glory with Christ, they will know that she has been loved with the same love. And when is it that the world shall see us in the same glory with Jesus? "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

It is the Church alone which is privileged to know and confess the humiliation of God's only-begotten Son, while his glory is yet hidden from the view of the world. Saints before the incarnation of Christ could not own him thus; for he had not then taken flesh. Saints after the return of Christ cannot own him thus; for then his glory will be manifested: it will neither be veiled as when he was here on earth, nor hidden as now while he is at the right hand of God. But those who, during the period of his humiliation and rejection, have been led to know and to confess him as the Son of God, form the body, the Church, -a body which is associated with him in that highest place in heaven as well as on earth, which is his reward for having humbled himself from such infinite glory to such depths of sorrow and of shame.

I have said that the first mention of the Church in Scripture is connected with the confession of Christ as the Son of God. It is in Matt. 16. Our Lord asks, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." No one knew him. Even in his lesser glories, as the Son of David and the seed of Abraham, no one by nature knew him or acknowledged him. "But whom say ye that I am?" our Lord inquired. This draws from Peter the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He does not merely say, Thou art the Christ. Blessed confession this, as a Jew, of the One who was the Messiah promised to Israel. But he goes on: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. The living God. His faith embraces the whole compass and blessed fullness of the truth as to the person of Jesus. He evidently lays emphasis on the word "living,"—the Son of the living God! What is our Lord's reply? "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Romanists say that Peter is the rock on which Christ declared he would build his Church. But the heart which has been taught of God to join in Peter's confession needs no arguments to prove that " this rock " means not Peter, but the blessed One himself, whom Peter had just declared to be " the Christ, the Son of the living God." He himself, known and confessed, not as the Son of David merely, or the Son of Abraham, or the Son of man, but as the Son of the living God, was the rock on which the Church was to be built. And the gates of hell (or hades) were not to prevail against it. The Romanists speak of error as one of the gates of hell; and, assuming that their church is the true and only one, they argue that no charge of fatal error can be justly brought against it, because of this assurance, that the gates of hell (of which they say error is one) should not prevail against the Church of Christ. Such is their grand argument for the infallibility of their church. But the word here rendered "hell" is not gehenna, the place of torment for the wicked, but hades, the place or state of separate souls; and it is evidently used here as expressive of the power of death in contrast with Peter's confession of Christ as the Son of the living God. The Church is founded on that which is beyond the reach or the power of death,—even on the Son of the living God. With such a foundation, how could the gates of hades prevail against it?

Observe, too, it is "upon this rock I will build my Church." It is not "upon this rock I have built," or "upon this rock I am building," but "upon this rock I will build my church." The work was still a future one when our Lord spake.

He was presented to Israel as their Messiah; but they knew him not. There were those, indeed, whose hearts, like Peter's, grace had touched; but they discerned him in a better glory, "the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In this character, and as known in this character, he was to be the foundation of the Church. But, ere he could build it, he must pass through death; and of this he immediately goes on to speak in the passage we are considering. " From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he

must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Peter having confessed him as the Son of the living God, he declares that upon this rock he will build his Church. When? is the question which here seems to be supposed; and the answer is, "I must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." All this must be accomplished ere the building of the Church can commence. There is a passage of deepest interest as to this in John 11. Caiaphas had said, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." "This," we are told, "spake he not of himself: but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." It was for the nation of Israel he died; and so all the blessing of the earth, when the nation is the center of rule and of blessing in the millennial kingdom, will flow from the efficacy of his death. But it was not for that nation only: it was also to gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. There were children of God, but they were scattered abroad. To gather them together in one was the immediate object of the death of Christ. And what was this gathering together in one of the children of God? It was the formation of the Church. It was the joining together of the till then separate, isolated stones, by building them upon the foundation,—the Son of the living God. But, in order to do this, he must die. Sin must be put away by his one sacrifice ere saved sinners can be builded together for an habitation of God. The foundation, indeed, is the Son of the living God; but it was not as incarnate merely, but as having died and risen again, that he was actually to become the foundation of the Church. He must be declared to be the Son of God, and that was by resurrection. He " was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead " (Rom. 1:3,4). It is not only on Christ as the Son of the living God that the Church is built as a foundation; but, ere he actually became the foundation of the Church, he had passed through death atoningly. In his resurrection he had set it aside, " abolished " it (see 2 Tim. 1:10); and having ascended into heaven, the Holy Ghost having come down by virtue of his work and in answer to his prayer (see John 14:16), the Church was formed by his uniting into one body, with Christ in glory, all who believed in his name. " For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). If, then, we are thus one with him who is the Son of the living God, and who has passed through death and set it aside, how can the gates of hades prevail against the Church?

Let us now, for a moment, return to the Epistle to the Ephesians. We have seen Israel's calling is to temporal blessings in earthly places, even in the land promised to their fathers. But what are our blessings, as set forth in this epistle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." In heavenly places; not a heavenly frame of mind, as many understand this passage. That would surely be included in spiritual blessings. But we are taught what the region is in which we are thus blessed with all spiritual blessings: it is in heavenly places. Let me ask you, my brethren, where is the Lord Jesus Christ? Where is the risen and glorified Son of man? Is he not in heaven,—literally and actually in heaven? And is it not in this very chapter that we are told of " the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places". This is exactly the same expression as in ver. 3: "Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." Our place is where he is, at the right hand of God. Our portion, treasure, inheritance,—our life, our peace, our joy,—in a word, our blessings, are all there: "Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." We are the body of him who actually sits there; and, vitally united with him by the Holy Ghost, faith reckons—even as God accounts—his place to be our place in him

In the beginning of Eph. 2 we have a glance at what our natural condition is,—"dead in trespasses and sins." Then in ver. 4: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,"—given us one life with him whom he raised from the dead " (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And for what end is this? That all the nations of the earth may see how happy a thing it is to be under the government of the Prince of peace? No: that is the object of Israel's calling. But why are we thus raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ? It is "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." And then in chap. 3:9, 10, we find that there is even a present display to those in heaven: "God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known BY THE CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is God's eternal purpose that even now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places—and in the ages to come to all—shall be exhibited, by means of the Church, his manifold wisdom, and the exceeding riches of his grace. May our hearts enter more fully through grace into this stupendous design.

The apostle proceeds, in Eph. 2, to show, that, instead of the distinction between Jew and Gentile being maintained in the Church, it is entirely obliterated. It is not that the Gentiles are brought into blessing, as they will be in the millennium, in a place subordinate to that of the Jews, but that both Jews and Gentiles are brought out of their natural state and position altogether into vital union with Christ in glory. "Wherefore, remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that at that time ye were without Christ," -Christ was of Israel according to the flesh, but the Gentiles sustained no such relationship to him, -"being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Such was our condition as Gentiles. God was the God of Israel, and they had the hope of their Messiah's coming to fulfill all the promises made to their fathers. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." How nigh? So nigh as to be servants of Israel? their plowmen and vinedressers, as the Gentiles will be in millennial times? Is that our place? Are we the favored plowmen and vinedressers of the more favored nation of God's choice, Israel on the earth? Hear what the apostle says: "For he (Christ) is our peace, who hath made both (Jews and Gentiles who believe) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." Can anything be plainer than what we are here taught? We are not brought into that place of subjection to Israel which will belong to the spared nations of the earth in millennial times. We are not brought into the position which Israel itself will then occupy. No: but we are brought into one immeasurably higher and more blessed than either. The Jew, with all his privileges, is by nature dead in sins. The out-cast, far-off Gentile is but in the same condition before God. What has God in his grace done for us both? Rich in mercy, he has quickened us, whether Jews or Gentiles, together with Christ. He has brought the Jew out of his natural position as a Jew, and the Gentile out of his natural position as a Gentile, and brought both into the entirely new and wondrous position of being the body of the heavenly glorified man, of him who, being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, humbled himself to the death of the cross. He has now, as his reward for this, a name which is above every name,—the name of JESUS,—at which name, indeed, the Church herself bows the

adoring knee; but he is also "Head over all things," and we are his body. He died, as we have seen, to make in himself of twain one new man. There is a new, mystic man; of which Christ in glory is the Head, and of which all who believe during the period of its

formation are members. And this is the sense in which we are said to be "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." All my members are the fullness, or complement, which constitute my body. If a joint of my little finger were wanting, I should not be a complete man. Thus is the Church the fullness, the complement, of this new, heavenly man. Christ in glory is the Head, and in all things he has the pre-eminence. But the feeblest saint is essential to the completeness of the body. The head (and we know who that is) cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you. (See 1 Cor. 12:21.) Hence, in Eph. iv., the gifts are said to be bestowed "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." It is not "till we all come to be perfect men: "no, but till we all come unto "a perfect man; "that is, until the body, the bride of Christ, be completed. It was for this that Jesus died. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Wondrous truth! "He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." "This is a great mystery," says the apostle, "but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

To one other point I would advert. Peter exhorts the saints to whom he wrote, to desire, as new-born babes, the sincere milk of the word, "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 lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:3-5). To whom coming as unto a living stone. Of whom is it that Peter speaks? Of himself? Impossible. It is of him whom he had confessed as the Son of the living God. But observe the next words: "disallowed indeed of men." "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men." The Church is founded on Christ, known and confessed as the Son of the living God; but this stone is one "disallowed indeed of men." It is a Christ rejected by the world, on which the Church is founded. Here we have a most solemn test, and one of easy application, by which to judge any association professing to be the Church, or a part of the Church. If it be that which man can allow,—if it be an institution which the world can own and adorn with goodly gifts,—it is not the rejected Church of the rejected Son of God. Let me not be misunderstood. There may be true members of the Church of God associated with that which in its corporate character is wedded to the world, and impregnated with its spirit. But, clearly, the word before us would not only entitle us to ask, but would render it obligatory on us that we should ask, as to anything pretending to be the Church, Is it, or is it not, disallowed of men? He who is the true foundation is so; and that which is really based thereon must share with him his rejection by the world. That which is supported by the world's strength, adorned with the world's glory, and crowned with the world's plaudits, can scarcely be viewed as the lively stones built up as a spiritual house on the one living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious! The Lord quicken our consciences, and give us understanding in all things!

Time would fail to occupy half the ground which is covered by this most interesting subject. But there are two or three essential characteristics of the Church, the body of Christ, which must not be passed by. And, first, its holiness. Separated to God in a nearness of relationship and intimacy of communion which attach to none besides, how can it be otherwise than holy? How affectingly is this taught in John 17, where our blessed Lord, praying for those who were to compose his body, the Church, says, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." Again: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (Think of this, beloved brethren.) I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world (that is, take them away to heaven at once), but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Could anything present the holiness of the Church, as one in life and character with its Head in glory, in a more solemn and affecting point of view than this? What is the measure of the holiness and separation from the world which properly attaches to the Church? Precisely that which attaches to her Head in glory. May we all lay these things to heart!

Then there is the unity of the Church. I put it to your consciences, my brethren: how many churches has Christ? We know, indeed, that unity is the false boast of Rome; and there are others who advance the same pretensions. But what is the unity thus gloried in? Not the holy unity for which Jesus prays in the seventeenth of John, but a unity which embraces the whole world in any given sphere where it is pretended that it exists. Rome (and would that in this she were alone) baptizes whole nations, and calls them the Church, and then boasts of her unity and catholicity. But a unity subversive of holiness is not the unity of the bride of Christ. Has she, therefore, no unity at all? Has Christ many bodies, many brides? The thought is almost blasphemous. His spouse, his undefiled, is one. It is a solemn thought for us to ponder: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." My brethren, is this that to which we are practically bearing witness,—that there is but one Church, including all who are living members of Christ, quickened into union with him by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven?

Further: one most essential characteristic of the Church (may we not say the essential characteristic?) is the presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. Both the holiness and the unity of the Church flow from this. Saints, disciples of Christ, children of God, there were, before the descent of the Holy Ghost,—persons quickened by the Spirit, born of the Spirit, as all saved persons in all dispensations are,—but no Church. It was the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost that formed the Church; and, though the mystery of the distinct calling and glory of the Church thus formed was not revealed until Paul received grace and apostleship from the Lord, still the body itself was formed at the day of Pentecost, and has existed from that epoch. When the Holy Ghost had descended from the Head in glory, to indwell and animate and govern and build together the members here below, then, and not until then, it could be said, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." Blessed truth! may our souls receive it and hold it fast!

Finally, there is that in the relationship between Christ and the Church which is deeper and more blessed than the highest glory. Glory, as we have seen with regard to Christ himself, is displayed excellency. But are there not beauties and delights in Jesus, for the heart taught and enabled of the Holy Ghost to enjoy him, which cannot be displayed? Oh, yes! and if the Church be indeed the bride, the Lamb's wife, can it be her highest pleasure and delight that she shares all the given glory which displays the excellency of her Bridegroom and Lord? Surely there are reciprocal affections pertaining to that relationship which cannot be exhibited,—a fellowship of spirit, a union of heart, a mutual joy in each other, perfectly ineffable. And into this we are called by faith, through the power of the Holy Ghost, to enter even now. But, if we do

speak of glory, what is her glory? All the given glory of her Head. Specially associated with him in that which is his highest given glory, what is there of his that can be communicated or shared in which she will not partake? Ask you what is the bride's portion? Her title declares her participation in all that constitutes the inheritance of the Bridegroom. Here it is we see the surpassing glory of the Church There is nothing like it in heaven or in earth, save the glory of him by union with whom it is she inherits it, and who in all things has the preeminence. It is by union with him that we receive this portion. And this explains what would not otherwise be understood. Suppose a certain king, the monarch of wide domains, should pass by all the several ranks of nobility in his empire, and choose for his bride and the partner of his throne one who, by birth and parentage and condition, was immeasurably beneath them all. Inferior to them as in herself she is, the moment she becomes, by his sovereign choice, the monarch's bride, she takes her place by his side, and all others rank beneath her then. Well, what are we, beloved brethren, in ourselves? Poor, wretched sinners, dead in trespasses and sins. Where has sovereign grace placed us? In living union, as his body, his bride, with the One whom God has raised from the dead, and set at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come! Yes: God hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth, all in all! And to think that most of those who form this body are poor sinners of the Gentiles! Surely the crumbs which have fallen to us, poor Gentile dogs, prove to be a far richer portion than the children's bread! Would that our hearts were more conversant with these blessed realities! How dull and unattractive does all earthly glory seem in the light of this glory that excelleth! And how may we reckon, with the apostle, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us God grant us thus to know, and thus to estimate, the place of blessing and of joy in which he has set us, in union with Christ, at his right hand!

W. T.

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