

The Doctrine of the Wheels, in the Visions of Ezekiel, Opened and Explained.

by John Gill

The wheels in Ezekiel's visions represent the gospel-churches, which are the representatives of gospel-churches, described by their number, character, seats, and motion.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:4, Isaiah 32:15-18, Ezekiel 10:13, Matthew 24:31, Acts 20:24, Romans 11:33, 1 Corinthians 12:21-23, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Hebrews 1:14, Revelation 4:2

Topics: "Church Unity", "The Role of Ministers"

Description

John Gill expounds on the significance of the wheels in Ezekiel's visions, interpreting them as representations of the churches of Christ under the Gospel dispensation. He emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the wheels (churches) and the cherubim (ministers), highlighting their interdependence and the necessity for harmony in their functions. Gill discusses various interpretations of the wheels, including their symbolism of the world and God's providence, and he stresses the importance of the Spirit's presence in both ministers and churches for effective ministry. He concludes with a call for prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit to ensure the vitality and unity of the church.

Transcript

The

DOCTRINE OF THE WHEELS,

IN THE VISIONS OF EZEKIEL,

OPENED AND EXPLAINED.

A Sermon,

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EZEKIEL 10:13

As for the Wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O Wheel.

SOME time ago, on a public occasion, I delivered a discourse (since printed) concerning the Cherubim, or Living Creatures, frequently mentioned in these visions of Ezekiel; and I then intimated, that as by the Cherubim we are to understand the Ministers of the gospel; so by the Wheels, the Churches of Christ under the Gospel-dispensation. And since I am about to preach to an assembly of Churches, there can be no impropriety in treating on such a subject at this time. Various are the interpretations given of these Wheels.

The more commonly received sense of them is, that they signify the World, and all things in it, which are changeable, unsettled, and uncertain; and the Providences of God, which are various and different, and cause changes, revolutions, and vicissitudes, in men and things one generation passeth away, and another cometh; some are wheeling out of the world, and others wheeling into it; things whirl about continually as the wise man says (Eccles. 1:4, 6) of the wind, and return again according to their circuits; and yet they are not carried by a blind impetus, but are tinder the guidance of unerring wisdom, and under the direction of the omniscient Being, whose eyes run to and fro through the whole earth; (Zech. 4:10) hence it is thought these wheels are said to befall of eyes: and though the providences of God, many of them are intricate and obscure, and so are as it were a wheel within a wheel: the reasons of them are not easily penetrated into, nor the ends God has in view at once to be seen; his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out; (Rom. 11:33) yet there is a harmony and consistency between them, they are all of a piece; the Wheels have all one likeness; and when the mystery of God in providence shall be finished, and his judgments are made manifest, they will appear harmonious, beautiful, and delightful.

But from this generally received interpretation, many have thought fit to recede; some, as by the Cherubim, or Living Creatures, understand the Churches of God, composed of living saints: so by the Wheels they suppose angels are meant, and that what wheels are to chariots, that angels are to churches, useful and subservient to them; ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who are the heirs of salvation: (Heb. 1:14) others are of opinion, that churches and members of churches are designed both by the Cherubim and the Wheels; by the one the superior members of the churches, and by the other the inferior ones: such a distinction in churches may be admitted, for God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, &c. and the rest of the members, the private and common ones, may be reckoned the inferior, yet all useful and necessary; the Cherubim are thought to be meant by the former, the wheels by the latter; and a chariot without wheels is of little or no use, as wheels without a chariot, or other carriage, are insignificant; and thus, as the apostle argues with respect to the members of an human body, the eye cannot say to the head, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you; yea, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. (1 Cor. 12:21-23, 28) Others, as they interpret the Cherubim of the ministers of the gospel, and I think rightly, so the wheels of the work of their ministry, which is sometimes called a course, a race, or running; thus John's ministry is said to be his course, and the apostle Paul joins his course and ministry together, as meaning the same thing; and elsewhere directs, to pray that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified: (Acts 13:25 & 20:24) and it is observed, that there is but one wheel, one faith, one doctrine of faiths or system of truths to be delivered and received; and though ministered by different persons, and these have different gifts, yet, as to the sum and substance of it, is the same; as the apostle says, The son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me, and Sylvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay; (2 Thess. 3:1; 2 Cor. 1:19) we did not contradict ourselves, nor one another; there is an unity, harmony, and consistence, in the ministration of the gospel; the wheels have one likeness; and though the doctrines of the gospel are mysterious, abstruse, and hidden to many, are like a riddle, or an enigma, or as a wheel within a wheel yet they are plain to

enlightened minds, to them that find spiritual and experimental knowledge: and as wheels when set in motion roll on with force and rapidity; so the doctrines of the gospel, when the Spirit of God is in those wheels, or when they are attended with his energy, they come with demonstration and power, and are the power of God unto salvation.

But the key for the interpretation of the Wheels, as the Cherubim, is to be taken from John's vision in the fourth chapter of the Revelation; for as the Cherubim, or living creatures, in Ezekiel's visions, are the same with John's four beasts, or living creatures; so the Wheels here are the same with the four and twenty elders there, which are the representatives of gospel-churches; described by their number, in allusion to the four and twenty courses of the priests, in the time of David; by their character, as elders, in distinction from the church of the Old Testament, and its members; who were as children in their non-age, under the elements of this world; whereas gospel-churches, and their members, are young men and fathers, grown men in knowledge and understanding; by their seats, and thrones on which they sat, expressive of their power and authority of judging and determining things relative to their own affairs within themselves; as who shall be received among them, retained by them, or excluded from them: What have I to do, says the apostle, to judge them that are without?

Do not ye judge them that are within?(1 Cor. 5:12) They are also described by their raiment, clothed in white linen; that fine linen, clean, and white, which is the righteousness of the saints, and that is the righteousness of Christ; and by having on their heads crowns of gold, signifying they are made kings and priests unto God by Jesus Christ. And now that these and the wheels signify the same, may be concluded partly by their situation; the same situation the elders have in John's vision, the wheels have in Ezekiel's; in John's vision there was a throne, and one on it, the Lord Jesus Christ; next to this throne were the four living creatures, or ministers of the word; who receive their commission, power, and authority, gifts, grace, light and knowledge, from Christ; on the throne; next to them are the elders, or gospel-churches, to whom they communicate what they receive from Christ; see Rev. 4:2, 4 and v. 6, and 7:11.

So in the visions of Ezekiel, there was a throne, and nearest to the throne were the Cherubim; and by the Cherubim were the wheels, see Ezek. 1:15, 26 and 10:1, 2, 6, 9, and partly by their dependence on one another, and their order of operation: in John's vision the four living creatures move first, and give the lead in divine worship. Rev. 4:9, 10 and v. 14. So in Ezekiel's visions, as the Cherubim, or living creatures moved, so the wheels did; when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lift up from the earth, the wheels were lift up, Ezek. 1:19.

And again, when those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when these lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them, ver. 21; see also chap. 10:16-19. In this light, in this view of things, I shall consider the wheels, and shew the agreement between them and the gospel-churches; and my business will be to observe their name, their number, their situation, their form, figure, and appearance, and their motion. First, Their name, Wheels, or Wheel; as for the wheels, it was said in my hearing; or they were called in my hearing, by the following name, Galgal; which signifies something that may be rolled, a wheel, and that is round as that is, a circle, or a globe, or sphere: now as the round and circular form is a symbol of perfection; this may denote the comparative perfection of the gospel-churches to that of the Old-Testament-church under the law: the law made nothing perfect; the sacrifices of it were not perfect, nor could it by them make the comers thereunto perfect: but the bringing in of a better hope did; (Heb. 7:19) Christ, who is come an high priest of good things to come, the ground and foundation of all solid hope; he by one sacrifice has perfected his people for ever, obtained perfect peace and reconciliation, made a full atonement, wrought out a complete righteousness, and procured a full

pardon, and is become the author of eternal redemption and salvation; God having provided some better thing for us, under the gospel dispensation, that they, of the former dispensation, without us should not be made perfect: (Heb. 11:40) they were, as before observed, as children not grown up to maturity; but members of gospel-churches, in comparison of them, are arrived to the measure of the stature of Christ; though in comparison of the church triumphant, or saints in heaven, they are imperfect, know but in part, and prophesy but in part.

The word here used, as hinted before, signifies a globe, or sphere, and is used of the heavenly sphere, the concave, or expanse, which surrounds our globe, and in which the heavenly bodies move; and it is translated heaven in Psalm 78:18. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven; in Galgal, in the heavenly sphere: and it is easy to observe, that the gospel-church-state is called the heavenly Jerusalem, (Heb. 12:22) in distinction from the former dispensation, and heaven itself; and in which sense it is almost always, if not always, used throughout the book of the Revelation; and this may suggest unto us, that members of gospel-churches are, or should be, souls born again, born from above; heaven-born souls, partakers of the heavenly calling, and such as are pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.

Gospel-churches may be signified by wheels, because of their moveableness and changeableness. Wheels are rolled about and moved from place to place, and so have churches been. The first gospel-churches were planted in Judea, and then the kingdom of God, or gospel-church-state, was taken from thence, and carried into the Gentile world, where various churches were raised, as the seven churches of Asia; and what was threatened to one of them, the church of Ephesus, has been true of them all; that the candlestick, or church-state, should be removed out of its place; for where are those churches now?

Gospel-churches were first in the eastern part of the world, then they came more westerly, and now more northerly, where their chief seat is. Thus they have been wheeled about, and perhaps may take another circuit more southerly. Gospel-churches are not always in the same state and condition, as well as not in the same place: sometimes in prosperity, and sometimes in adversity; sometimes in a state of persecution, and sometimes in a state of peace and liberty. The first gospel-church was at Jerusalem, and was at first prosperous and numerous; but at length a persecution arose, by which its members were made havoc of, and its ministers scattered abroad; and so it fared with other churches; but after a time the churches had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified and multiplied; (Acts 8:1 and 9:31) and so it was with the churches among the Gentiles, they had tribulation ten days under the ten Roman emperors that persecuted them; and then there was silence in heaven for half an hour; peace and quietness in the churches for a small space of time; in the reign of Constantine. (Rev. 2:10 and 8:1) At one time, the church is represented in a most glorious and splendid manner, as clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; expressive of her dignity, and of her purity in doctrine and worship; and presently we hear of her taking two wings, and fleeing into the wilderness, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time; (Rev. 12:1, 6, 14) and in a changeable state on one account or another, have the churches of Christ been ever since; our forefathers in the last century suffered persecution; we now enjoy peace and liberty; what this will issue in, time only can discover.

The Cherubim are sometimes called the chariot of the cherubim; (1 Chron. 28:18) not that they themselves, abstractedly considered, form a chariot; though the Lord is said to ride upon a cherub; (Ps. 18:10) but, they with the wheels make one; for a chariot without wheels, as before observed, is of no use;

but with wheels it is fit for carriage; such is the church of Christ; it is said, king Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon; (Song. 3:9) by king Solomon is not meant literally Solomon king of Israel, but a greater than he, Christ his antitype, the prince of peace: and by the chariot he made for himself, his own use, service, and glory, may be meant his church; which, as composed of persons possessed of the fragrant graces of the Spirit, and having the odours of prayer and praise, and being persevering saints in faith and holiness, may be said to be made of the sweet-smelling and incorruptible wood of Lebanon; and in this chariot Christ rides up and down in the world, and does his work and business: and indeed wherever there are wheels of any sort, and upon any account, there is work to be done; and there is scarce any manufacture, but there is a wheel made rise of in one part and branch of it, or another: and in and by the churches of Christ much work is done; here the gospel is preached, the ordinances are administered, the sacrifices of prayer and praise are offered up, souls are converted, and saints edified and comforted, and God in all things glorified.

And when wheels are in motion, they make a great rattling and noise: we often read of the rushing of chariots, of the rumbling of their wheels, and of the noise of them on the tops of mountains; see Jer. 47:3; Joel 2:5; and when there is any work doing in the churches of Christ, especially any thing remarkable, it makes a great noise in the world. So in Judea, when the gospel was first preached there, and souls were in great numbers converted, and churches planted, the Sanhedrin, the elders, scribes, pharisees, and Sadducees, were alarmed with it; and in the Gentile world, wherever there was a door opened, a door of opportunity to preach the gospel, and a door of utterance in ministers, and a door of entrance into the hearts of men, there were many adversaries; (1 Cor. 16:9) to oppose Christ's ministers, to stir up men against them, and give out the cry, those that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also: (Acts 17:6) yea, there are great noises and shoutings in ministers of the word, and the churches themselves, when any remarkable and extraordinary work is going forward; so at the time of the Reformation, which the 10th chapter of the Revelation describes, when the voice of Christ was as when a lion roareth, he being the lion of the tribe of Judah; the seven thunders, the Boanerges, or sons of thunder, uttered their voices; and when the judgments of God will come down upon antichrist, and upon the antichristian states, and the marriage of the lamb will be come, and the church, the lamb's wife, made ready for him, and the spiritual reign of Christ will take place, a great voice of much people will be heard in heaven, the church; and a voice out of the throne, and the voice of a great multitude, as of many waters, and of mighty thunderings, saying Allelujah, salvation, glory, honour, and power, to the Lord our God: the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Rev. 12:1-7. Secondly, The number of the wheels is next to be considered. They are called wheels, in the plural number, in our text, and yet according to it were named a wheel, one wheel, as elsewhere in the vision, and yet four; see chap. 1:15, 16; they seem to be formed in this manner, like two hoops put in a cross and transverse manner, which intersect each other, and make four semicircles; and these four semicircles make one globe or sphere; and so there were one and yet four, and four and but one.

Indeed, from ver. 9, 14, it seems as if there were four in this form, since there was a wheel to every cherub, and every wheel had four faces; that is, on the four semicircles: now considered as one wheel, they represent the church catholic and invisible, the general assembly and church of the first-born, consisting of all the elect that have been, are, or shall be, even all those whose names are written in heaven; and this is but one, of which Christ says, There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number; many visible congregated churches, and a great number of particular saints: My love, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother, the choice one of her

that bare her. (Song. 6:8, 9) There is but one church, of which Christ is the head, the head of the body, the church; but one church, that he has loved with an everlasting love, and has given himself an offering and a sacrifice for unto God.

But particular congregated churches are many; and they are signified by the number four, partly with respect to the four cherubs, as appears from ver. 9. And when I looked, behold, the four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub; so in the first gospel churches, in every church elders were ordained; and in every city, that is, wherever there was a church, an elder, or pastor was appointed, and constituted over it; and for the most part but one in a church; though in some churches, which might be very large, there were more: hence we read of the elders of the church at Ephesus, and of bishops in Philippi; (Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1) but in the seven churches of Asia, there was but one angel, pastor, or bishop over each church, one wheel by one cherub; and partly the number four may be used with respect to the four parts of the world, where churches have been, or will be placed.

Christ gave his apostles a commission to preach the gospel to all nations, in every part of the world; and they did go, and their sound also, into all the earth, and unto the ends of the world; and multitudes were converted, and churches raised in all parts of it; and so it will be again, before the end of the world, and the coming of Christ; the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord; great numbers will be converted in the four parts of the world; God will bring the spiritual seed of Christ, and of his church, from the east, and gather them from the west; he will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; (Isai. 40:5, 6) who shall be gathered into gospel-churches; and at the close of time Christ will send forth his angels, and gather together his elect from the four winds, (Matt. 24:31) where they have lived in a gospel-church state.

Thirdly, The situation of the wheels; they were upon the earth, and by the cherubim. 1. They were upon the earth; Behold, one wheel upon the earth, chap. 1:15; and where one was, the four were; this is observed, to distinguish the churches of Christ here, from the church triumphant in heaven. Christ's family is partly in heaven, and partly on earth those whom Christ redeemed and gathered together in one head, himself, and reconciled unto God, are things in heaven, and things on earth; the chosen, redeemed, and called, are first gathered into Gospel-churches on earth, before they are removed to heaven, from whence they will descend again, as a bride adorned for her husband.

This points out the place where saints for the present are; though they are chosen, and called out of the world, yet; they are still in it; and the work done in churches is done by them whilst in the world; here the gospel is preached, and ordinances administered, conversion-work wrought, and edification in the way and manner it is; these are only done on earth: and this may also denote that the moveable and changeable state of the churches of Christ, before observed, is only on earth, and in the present earth; for in the new earth, the tabernacle of God that will be there and then with men, will be a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken; (Rev. 21:3; Isai. 35:10) no removing, no rolling, no wheeling from place to place, no change of state, condition, and circumstance; when the ransomed of the Lord are come to Zion, to the church above, everlasting joy will be upon their heads--and sorrow and sighing shall flee away: (Isai. 35:10) though this may likewise signify the firmness of gospel-churches; they are not in the air, nor on the sea, where wheels cannot be employed, but on terra firma; and what that is to wheels, Christ is to his churches, the base and foundation of them; the Lord has founded Zion, and it is well founded; he has laid in it for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, which is Jesus Christ; the foundation of the apostles and prophets; of their laying ministerially; and on which gospel-churches in all ages are laid, a

rock firm and sure, against which the powers of hell and earth cannot prevail. 2.

The wheels are said to be by the cherubim, or living creatures; see chap. 1:15. and 10:9, 16, 19; to be put in motion by them. The churches are placed by the ministers of the word, near them, and beside them, to put them in mind of, and to stir them up to the exercise of every grace, faith, hope, love, &c., and to put them in mind of every duty both towards God and man; that they be ready to every good work, and careful to maintain it; and to put them in remembrance of the doctrines of the Gospel they have made a profession of, that they hold them fast unto the end.

They are placed by them to instruct them in matters of faith, to declare to them the whole counsel of God, and keep back nothing from them that may be profitable to them; and to go before them, and give the lead to them in matters of worship, and to direct them in matters of discipline; to observe to them the rules of it, that they withdraw from persons that walk disorderly; and an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject. They are placed by them to watch over them, to watch for their souls, for the good of them, and to preserve them from every evil and false way, from immorality and heresy, from every thing dangerous and pernicious.

They are called watchmen, in allusion both to watchmen that go about the city, to give the time of night, and notice of any danger; and to watchmen on the walls, set there to descry an enemy, and give the alarm of his near approach, to provide against him. They are placed by them, the churches by the ministers, that they may feed them with knowledge and understanding, with the wholesome words of Christ, with the words of faith and good doctrine, with the sincere milk of the word, and with the bread of life.

Wherefore, if any should make the inquiry, where Christ feeds his flocks, let them take the answer and direction he gives; Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents; (Song. 1:7, 8) go where the cherubim and wheels be, where ministers and churches meet together for religious exercises. Fourthly, The form, figure, colour, and appearance of the Wheels, the description of which is various. 1. They are said to have four faces, as in the following verse; ver. 14.

And every one had four faces; the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third face the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle; the same with the faces of a cherubim. Ministers, of the churches are, or should be, of the same mind, of the same judgment, and of one accord; they should have the same face and look, and draw the same way; and then they are like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot; (Song. 1:9) they will put shoulder to shoulder, and serve the Lord with one consent.

The first face was that of a cherub, that is, of an ox, as appears from chap. 1:10; which has its name from plowing, in which the ox was employed, and gives the denomination to the whole figure: now this is a proper emblem of the members of gospel churches, it being a clean creature that chews the cud; and so describes such who ruminate on the word, who meditate in the law and doctrine of God night and day, constantly, as they have leisure and opportunity; and their meditation is sweet when they are led to the nature, perfections, and promises of God, to his everlasting love, and the covenant of grace, to the person, offices, and grace of Christ.

The ox is patient under the yoke when accustomed to it; and so are saints who have learnt, and have been inured to bear the yoke in their youth; whether the yoke of Christ's commands, which is easy and light; or the yoke of affliction, reproaches, and persecution, which they bear patiently for Christ's sake; tribulation works patience in them, and patience has its perfect work. The ox is a laborious creature, strong

to labour, and constant in it; and so fitly represents the members of gospel churches, who are, or should be, steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; as the members of the first gospel-church were, who continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The second face was the face of a man; signifying that they were knowing and understanding persons; were, in understanding, men, and had attained to a large measure of knowledge of divine and spiritual things, and were still growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ; and that they were, or should be, humane, kind to one another, tender-hearted, and put on bowels of compassion and tenderness to each other; and forgive one another any quarrel they lead, as God for Christ's sake forgave them; and that. they were sympathizing with each other in every condition and circumstance; wept with those that wept, and rejoiced with those that rejoiced.

The third face was the face of a lion; denoting courage, holiness, and intrepidity in the saints, who are, should be, as bold as a lion in the cause of Christ, and in the profession of him, holding fast his name, and not denying his faith, even where Satan's seat is; not being afraid of the faces of men, as they have no reason; for if God is for them, and on their side; if he is their light and life, their salvation and strength, they have nothing to fear from men or devils.

The fourth face was that of an eagle, a bird that has a piercing eye, and soars aloft, and describes such who mount up with wings as eagles, in the exercise of faith and love: who dwell on high, in God and Christ, and upon everlasting things; who seek after, and set their affections on things above, where Jesus is. 2. The appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone, ver. 9, so in chap. 1:16; which was one of the precious stones in the high priest's breast-plate, and one of the twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem, and with which the hands of Christ are said to be adorned.

This may denote the preciousness of the members of gospel-churches, what worth and value they are of in the esteem of Christ; these precious sons of Sion are not only comparable to fine gold, for their lustre, splendor, worth, and duration; but to jewels and precious stones; they shall be mine, says Christ, (Mal. 3:17) when I make up many jewels: and may signify the beauty and glory of the churches of Christ, and the members of them; whose cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, and their necks with chains of gold; (Song. 1:10) as they are adorned with the graces of the Spirit, and arrayed with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and the garments of his salvation; when they are as richly decked as the bridegroom. with his ornaments, and the bride with her jewels.

The colour of the beryl is the colour of the sea, or a sea-green; and the word for it, Tarshish, is used for the sea itself; and may lead to think of the fluctuating state of the churches or Christ in this world; which is as a tempestuous sea, and they as ships upon it, tossed with tempests, and not comforted; Christ is their pilot, faith the cable, and hope the anchor, sure and steadfast; and through the skill, ability, and guidance of the pilot, they are brought at last, through many storms and tempests, to the desired haven. 3.

The four wheels had one likeness, ver. 10. and chap. 1:16. Gospel-churches consist of one and the same sort of persons; who are enlightened by the Spirit of God to see their lost state by nature; are directed to Christ alone for salvation, and obtain like precious faith for nature, though not to the same degree; and whose experiences are similar: for as face answers to face in water, (Prov. 27:19) so do the hearts and experiences of God's people answer to each other: for though the Spirit of God may take a different course with some than with others; some have more of, and are held longer under, the terrors of the law;

whilst others are drawn with the cords of love, almost at once; they may have different promises applied, and different providences may be sanctified to them; yet the sum and substance, and tendency of their experience are the same, to debase the creature, exalt Christ, and magnify the riches of God's grace.

Gospel-churches have the same faith, the same doctrine of faith; for there is but one faith delivered to the saints they have the same ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper; and the same officers, bishops and deacons; they have the same power and authority to choose their own officers, as the first church did Matthias in the room of Judas; and deacons, when they became necessary: they have the same power to receive and exclude members; they are independent of others, and call no man master on earth; they have the same form of government, under Christ their Head, Lord and Master, whom they own and profess to be their King, Lawgiver, and Saviour, and no other.

They have pastors over them under Christ, whom they not only honour and esteem, but yield subjection to, when ruling well, according to the laws and institutions of Christ. They are said to be a wheel in the middle of a wheel, ver. 10 and chap. 1:16; not inclusively, as if one wheel was included in the other: for then they would not be alike, but one would be lesser than another; but they were put in that cross and transverse way before described, so that they seemed but one wheel, one globe or sphere; that is, one catholic church, built on the same foundation of the apostles and prophets; and which grows up into an holy temple in the Lord, and is built as one habitation for God, Father, Son, and Spirit. 5.

The rings, circles, and circumferences of these wheels deserve some notice: as for their rings, it is said, chap. 1:18; they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. (1.) These were very high, and so must in proportion be very large: and which may signify the visibility and extensiveness of the churches of Christ under the gospel-dispensation, especially in the latter day. The churches of Christ are like a city upon an high hill, which cannot be hid, but is seen at a great distance.

They are built upon a rock, that is exceeding high; and in the latter day they will be exalted above the high mountains and hills, the kingdoms and states of this world; and will be so enlarged when the nation of the Jews, and the fulness of the Gentiles are brought in, that there will be want of room for the members to dwell in them, Isai. 2:2. and chap. 49:20. (2.) They are said to be very dreadful, as the church militant is to her enemies, terrible as an army with banners; (Song. 6:4, 10) having Christ as a general at the head of it, with a large number of good soldiers of his under him, and accoutered with the whole armour of God, in rank and file, and colours flying; and as the church will be in her elevated state, when her slain witnesses are risen, and shall ascend to heaven; that is, come into a glorious and happy state in the sight of their enemies, and seven thousand men of name slain, and the remnant affrighted.

Or the word may here be rendered reverent; they were both reverend and reverent; respectable, in high esteem, as the church will be in the latter day, even to great personages; kings will be nursing fathers to her, and queens nursing mothers; and they will bow down towards her, and lid the dust of her feet, Isai. 49:23, and reverent; or there was fear, or they had fear in them; the fear of God is in his churches; he is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and the true members thereof serve him with reverence and godly fear. (3.)

These rings were full of eyes round about; the same is said of the wheels, that is, of the rings of them, ver. 12. This shews that the members of gospel-churches are such who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened by the Spirit of God, to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the demerit of it; to behold the

preciousness, excellency, suitableness, and fulness of Christ, as a Saviour; to look to him for life and salvation, for righteousness and strength, and every supply of grace; and that they have an insight into, and knowledge of the truths of the gospel, which are unseen and unknown to natural and carnal men; being led into them by the Spirit of truth, and having that anointing which teacheth all things necessary to salvation: and they are full of eyes, to watch over themselves and others; over themselves, that they walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, as becomes the gospel of Christ they profess; and over others, looking diligently, acting the part of a bishop or overseer, as every member of a church in this respect should: lest any man fail of the grace of God; come short of it, drop or deny any doctrine of grace: lest any root of bitterness, immorality, or heresy, springing up, trouble some of the members, and many thereby be defiled (Heb. 7:15) with bad principles, or with bad practices.

Fifthly, The motion of the wheels, which motion, 1. Was not retrograde; they went on their four sides, they turned not as they went, ver. 11, neither to the right, nor left: or they returned not when they went, chap. 1:17, they did not go back, but went straight on; true members of gospel churches; are such she draw not back to perdition, but go on believing; having put their hand to the plough, (Heb. 10:39; Luke 9:62) having made a profusion of Christ, and his gospel, they neither look back, nor draw back, or they would not befit for the kingdom of heaven; they turn not to the right hand, nor the left; but walk on in Christ, and their profession of him, as they have received him, and in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, which he has appointed to be observed. 2.

Their motion is the same with the cherubim, or living creatures: as the one moved, so the other did; the wheels went by the cherubim, by the sides of them, ver. 16,19. Ministers are, or should be, examples to the churches in purity or doctrine and conversation; and churches should walk as they have them for an example, and be followers of them, as far as they are followers of Christ; they are to go by their side, and keep pace with them in faith and practice; when they, the cherubim, stood, these, the wheels stood; when they were lifted up, these lift up themselves also, ver. 17; see chap. 1:19, 21.

Churches observe the motions of the ministers, and act accordingly; they give the lead in worship, as before observed; when they lift up their hearts with their hands in prayer and praise, the members of churches follow, and join them; when they are it elevated frames of soul in their work, and are warm and lively in their ministrations, generally speaking, the churches are so likewise; but if they are dull and heavy, motionless and inactive, slothful in business, and not fervent in spirit, the members are so too; as ministers are, for the most part, the churches be. 3.

The wheels followed the head, which guided and directed them: to the place where the head looked, they followed it, ver. 11. the head or face on each semicircle, the same with those of the Cherubim; and so may denote ministers, pastors, guides, and governors of the churches; whose faith they are to follow, considering the end of their conversation: or rather Christ, the head of the church, the Lamb, that is to be followed whithersoever he goes, and in whatsoever he directs; unless, 4.

The Spirit of God is meant, since it is said in chap. 1:20. Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, they went; truly gracious souls walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; they are led by him into all truth, as it is in Jesus; and they walk in all the paths of faith and duty, as they are influenced and guided by him in a right way, to the city of their habitation, to a land of uprightness; for, 5. The spirit of the living creatures was in them, ver. 17, that is, in the wheels, chap. 1:20, 21, the spirit of life which is in Christ, and from Christ, is in his ministers; and the same spirit that is in his ministers, is in the churches; and he is both a spirit of life, and a spirit of liberty, in the exercise of grace, and performance of duty; for there is but one spirit in all,

though in a different measure; even as saints are by one spirit baptized into one body, the church, and are called in one hope of their calling (1 Cor. 12:13; Ephes. 4:4) to the same happiness and glory.

Now these visions of Ezekiel, in this and the first chapters as they give a glorious and beautiful representation of the state of ministers and churches under the gospel-dispensation; they may be read with pleasure, delight, and profit, when spiritually understood; yet they are closed with a melancholy scene of things; the cherubim are represented as mounting up from the earth, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel above them all, ready to take their flight, and depart, ver. 19, and chap. 11:22, 23, which may signify the removal of gospel-ministers from earth to heaven by death, and the breaking up of gospel-churches, and the departure of God from his professing people, of which we have already had some instances: and, without pretending to a spirit of prophecy, things will continue to go on in this way, worse and worse, till the kingdom of God will be taken from us, the candlestick be removed out of its place, the glory of God depart, and an Ichabod be wrote on his interest; which will be completed when the witnesses are slain: and then scarce a cherub will be seen, nor a wheel in motion; the dead bodies of the witnesses will lie unburied, none daring to shew a decent regard unto them.

From what has been said, we may learn, 1. The nature of gospel-churches, the matter of which they consist, the form of them, the work that is done in them, and by them, and their state, condition, and circumstances, under the present dispensation. 2. The necessity there is of an harmony between ministers and churches it is highly requisite they should agree, and act in concert; the wheels should be by the cherubim, and move as they do; they should join and unite to promote the interest of religion or things will never go on happily and comfortably. 3.

This may instruct and direct us to pray for the Spirit of God to be poured down upon both ministers and churches that ministers may have a larger measure of it, and that the spirit of the living creatures might be in the wheels; the same, or a like measure of the spirit that is in ministers, might be in the churches; and for this we should pray importunately and incessantly; for we shall never have happy times, or halcyon days, until the Spirit be poured down upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest; then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever; and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (Isai. 32:15-18)

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