

**BUILDING OR DEMOLITION**

—P. S. van der Ster

The assemblies then throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, and were increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 9:31*

Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works: but if not, I am coming to thee, and I will remove thy lamp out of its place, except thou shalt repent.

*Revelation 2:5*

From the above verses we learn two weighty truths: the Lord builds the assemblies (churches) and adds men, and: the Lord rebukes, disciplines, judges, and removes.

The first truth is joyful news, the second is very serious. In the first case the condition of the assembly is good and acceptable to God, in the second the condition of the assembly is worthy of judgment.

In the first case there is a listening to the guiding of God's Spirit and a walking in the light so that any going astray and any sins are soon revealed and judged. In the second case the authority of the Spirit has been put aside, despised and not appreciated; the Spirit of God has been grieved and quenched, thereby causing an ever increasing condition of ruin. Sins are seldom or never recognized and if they are recognized, they are no longer judged as such by the assembly, it does no longer separate itself from the evil.

Although today no group can claim to be the local assembly or church, yet believers may meet on the basis of the assembly and may know that the principles of God remain the same throughout the ages. They must be guided by these principles, even today.

If an assembly walks according to the light then the features of Acts 9:31 will be present. Otherwise an assembly will fare according to Revelation 2:5. All the assemblies mentioned in Revelation have disappeared!

*Feature one: Peace.*

What is meant here is not in the first place *peace with God*, for that is possessed by all who believe, in the Lord Jesus. It is rather the *peace of God* and peace among one another.

To experience such peace one has to go his way at the Father-hand of God. One has to be able, to say in all circumstances, "All that God does is done well." He is a Father Who does not make mistakes. If we want to enjoy this peace, it is essential that we walk according to the light, and that there is nothing in our life that comes between the soul and God. Then there will also be a living in peace with each other, for he who loves God, also loves those who are born of Him. How pleasant will it be in the eyes of the Lord when brethren dwell together in this way. This will result in fruitfulness.

Under such circumstances the Spirit of God can work unhindered in individuals as well as in the whole. All will grow up in knowledge and grace, while they learn to understand more and more the thoughts and plans of God. All will be subjected to the leading and discipline of the Spirit. When one member suffers all members will truly suffer with him and when one rejoices, all will rejoice. When one sins, all will have the sense of being connected with the evil, making cleansing essential. The Spirit of God will immediately reveal every sin in whatever form it comes and the assembly will not hesitate to confess, to judge and to remove the evil one.

As regards this we can often observe a sad situation. There may be *peace with God*, but the *peace of God* is missing. Murmuring and complaining one goes his way irritated by the ways of God. There is no acceptance of what God is doing. And things become worse when mutual peace is gone; or, if perhaps it is still present, the evidence of it is very meagerly. Brethren cling together as loose sand, and begin to see or to imagine things in each other, and finally they cannot find anything good in each other and they speak with others about it. And so it goes on. Frequently, in such a condition there is

much criticism regarding the teaching. There is no longer rejoicing in the truth, although there remains a speaking about the love of God and the example of the Lord Jesus. Not seldom there are plenty of works, but under it all the first love, that hidden life of fellowship with the Lord, has been left. In such a state of things the Lord says, "Remember from where thou hast fallen and repent."

#### *Feature two: Edification.*

How are the hearts refreshed when someone speaks in edification! The Lord gave gifts to the Assembly and the Spirit uses whomsoever He will. In the first assemblies there was most certainly a waiting upon the Lord and for each other, and the one who spoke, spoke as words of God. Today it can still be the same if an assembly is conscious of its dependence upon the Lord. Then all will quietly sit down and will thankfully accept what the Spirit of God deems necessary to make known and all will be edified, comforted and admonished.

How much are we edified when the Lord is presented to us in His love and grace! How do we praise God's wisdom and faithfulness when the scriptural truths are simply and clearly expounded! How good for our hearts when the Word is unfolded, explained and applied to our hearts and consciences! How thankful may we be when we once again have received, often through a simple word of someone who goes his way in peace with God, food for the soul on our journey!

But how is it when there is no peace? Then we are not edified by the very best. Then a beautiful well-fitted line of reasoning and a faultless presentation and pronunciation are sought after. Then, finally, there is destructive criticism about little things of secondary nature and, in the end, one is not edified but offended. At home the criticism is continued and great damage is caused to the family and all are thoroughly dissatisfied.

A person offends when he does not wait upon the Lord but gives out a hymn because it is such a nice one, or when he rises quickly to speak to avoid that someone else might be ahead of him. These things grieve the Holy Spirit and dishonour the name of the Lord, they are secondary, the result of the first thing: no peace and no edification. And finally there is not even the third thing: no fear of God.

#### *Feature three: Peace of God.*

When there is no peace and no edification it will have an effect on our practical spiritual life. There will no longer be "fear." In Peter we read, "If you invoke as Father Him Who, without regard of persons, judges according to the work of each, pass your time of sojourn in fear." The fear of God is distinct from conversion. Our walk ought to be in agreement with the will of God. We call Him our Father and He watches carefully which way His children walk. How good it was to see this in the early assembly! The believers went their way in the fear of the Lord. Our fear of the Lord expresses itself and can be observed in our subjection to His commandments. In the beginning all walked that way. They persevered and observed all what the Lord Jesus had enjoined them (Mt. 28:20; Acts 2:42,46). And when evil was revealed in Acts 5, there was great "fear" upon the assembly. So we ought to go our way in the fear of God. Even today He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. 1:13). He is the One Who searches the reins and the hearts (Rev. 2:23). Even today He is the Lord Who holds the plumbline (Amos 7:7) to the edifice of the assembly. The Lord is well pleased with good walls built by God-fearing people (Neh. 4:6,15). But old, decaying and crooked walls He removes (Ps. 62:4, Is. 30:13,14; Ezek. 22:30).

#### *Feature four: Multiplication.*

The Lord adds His blessing to those who go their way in the fear of God. He multiplies and adds (Acts 2:47), so it is here: they were multiplied. The preaching of the gospel is the means whereby the assembly is increased, but this preaching must be done by those who go their way in the fear of the Lord. First the works, then the words; first the practical life, then the testimony. How is it that some assemblies, in spite of much gospel preaching are only experiencing a languishing existence? Would it perhaps be a lack of the fear of God? And why does the Lord remove some of the testimonies? Although we may not always be able to establish the reason, it ought to cause us to think and to search our hearts.

There might perhaps be sin: hardness, lack of contrition, fellowship with evil; maybe these things are not seen by men but observed by Him Who has eyes as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14). Now we should not water this down by saying, "The circumstances led to it. Some brethren moved away, others had to move to another town because of marriage or employment, some have gone to be with the Lord, there were only a few children, etc." *The Lord* builds and removes according to the behaviour of the responsible believers: are they faithful or careless, do they value and obey the instructions and truths of God or deny them and spurn them?

These are certainly two very serious truths. On the one hand peace, edification, fear of God and multiplying, there where believers live under the breath of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. On the other hand lack of peace, stubbornness, fighting, division and sin.

We are responsible for the place we occupy, so that we will not be judged, neither personally nor collectively as an assembly. Let our life always be a sweet odour of Christ and our prayer as expressed in this hymn:

*Saviour lead us by thy power  
safe into the promised rest.*

## **THE OFFERINGS (6)**

—H. L. Heijkoop

*Leviticus 16:15-22, 29-31*

During our discussions on verses 11-15 we spoke of the bringing of the blood into the sanctuary. Now I want to start with verse 16, but I included verse 15 to show the connection with the preceding verses. There we saw how the blood was brought into the sanctuary and sprinkled on the mercy-seat so that God's righteousness and holiness were completely satisfied. In these verses we see this in connection with us, with man. So it is ever in the New Testament: Christ has *also* finished the work for us. He "loved us and delivered Himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2).

In Colossians 1 we see that the blood of Christ has such power that not only have we been cleansed by Him so that God has been completely satisfied concerning us, but also that on the basis of His work, *heaven and earth* will be cleansed as well. That is presented in verse 16. However, we do not find here the fullness of this work in all its consequences. For, although the types in Leviticus are truly applicable to us, they were given to Israel as a people under the law; therefore, they do not agree with the reality in all its fullness. Thus, we do not have here the atonement of heaven and earth, but only of the sanctuary, which in figurative language means the heavens. Of course the earth will be cleansed as well, but that could not yet be presented in this passage.

Aaron was allowed to enter the sanctuary. For us the way into the sanctuary is open. The Epistle to the Hebrews explicitly informs us of this (10:19). We know that when the Lord Jesus died, the veil was rent from top to bottom so that all who are connected with Him may enter the sanctuary.

But in the Word of God there is an important principle: *contact with evil causes defilement*. Neither the earth nor the heavens sinned, but they are defiled by the fact that we live on earth and Satan is in the heavenlies, and we may enter there through faith. Here we see the wondrous way the Lord Jesus has made provision for this. The sanctuary was also cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus. God cannot tolerate any uncleanness in His presence, and we are, practically speaking, not always clean. But even this is provided for. Any uncleanness brought in by us has also been removed by the blood of the Lord Jesus. If this were not so, we would never be able to appear in the presence of God.

But we may observe another thing in verses 18 and 19. Aaron had to "go out (into the court) unto the (brazen) altar which is before Jehovah and make atonement for it." The court was a type of the earth as the place on which the cross has been erected. But the brazen altar is also called the Table of the Lord (Mal. 1:12) and this verse shows us that the brazen altar was the place where God met His people.

Moses was allowed to enter the sanctuary. When God spoke with Him, he entered the holy of holies, for he alone being a type of the Lord Jesus, was *always* allowed to enter the most holy place, whereas Aaron was only allowed once a year. We see this in Exodus 25:22 and in Numbers 7:89. But in Exodus 29:42 we see that when God wanted to speak with His people, it took place at the brazen altar. In connection with this, the tabernacle was called the tent of meeting. The people were allowed to bring their offerings there.

The Israelites were allowed to eat of the peace-offering (Lev. 3,7). There we see that God received a part of the offering which He called His bread (3:11,16). Aaron also received a part of it (7:31), he being a type of the Lord Jesus. The one who brought the offering ate also from it, as did all the people who were clean (7:19). It was, therefore, a meal for the entire family of God which took place at this altar.

Isn't this a type of what we do on Lord's Day morning? I do not know of any type in the Old Testament that is more closely connected with the Lord's Supper than this: the Lord's Table where the family of God in oneness partakes and eats of the offering that has been brought. But are we always clean in a practical sense when we approach the Lord's Table? And is the flesh never active when we are thus gathered? Often it is the case. Our thoughts are not always solely occupied with the Lord: unclean thoughts sometimes enter our hearts, and we sometimes forget to judge ourselves.

God cannot have fellowship with sin, and the brazen altar is the most lofty expression of holiness. It was the *brazen* altar, type of the Lord Jesus, and though it was made of wood, it was covered with brass or copper. What brass was used for it? We know the story in Numbers 16 of the insurrection of Dathan and Abiram and the 250 men with them. These men approached God with brazen censers; the earth opened its mouth and Dathan and Abiram and their company went alive into sheol. Meanwhile, fire descended from heaven and consumed the 250 men who were bringing incense. But the brazen censers were not consumed; they went through the fire of God and were not consumed. And God said that the altar had to be covered with this brass.

This latter event shows us that the brazen altar signifies the Lord Jesus as the Man Christ Jesus. It was an altar of wood, but He was so holy, that the judgment of God could not consume anything of Him. He could pass through the judgment without anything in Him having to be consumed.

That is the Table of the Lord, the most holy place on earth. How has it become possible for us to be there? We know ourselves, don't we? Well, the blood was shed on the altar, the only place on earth where it was shed. The sanctuary had been cleansed by blood, but apart from that, only this altar was sprinkled with the blood. And therefore, we can gather there. Thus the Lord's Table where we meet one another with the Lord in our midst, derives its value and power from the blood of the Lord Jesus so that He can be in our midst in spite of the fact that the flesh may still be working in us.

Although it does not directly concern us, I want to look a little deeper into this since, from the foregoing, one could conclude that it does not matter if there is sin in our midst. The Word of God sharply distinguishes between sins that we know and sins of which we are not aware, and also between living in sin and falling in sin. The presence of sin does not render it impossible for the Lord to be present, but refusal to judge evil certainly does. If the presence of sin would result in the Lord not being able to be in our midst, He then would never be able to be there. Are we always aware whether something is not right with us? Have we always confessed the things that were to be judged? Practically, that is not possible since we do not always remember all our thoughts and all our words, and we often have done things which we thought to be right, but which were nevertheless not right. If those wrong things hindered the Lord being in our midst, He would never be able to be with His own.

That is why we have the blood here. It is the very same thing as for the sinner who comes to the Lord. The blood of the Lord Jesus has such a power that every sinner who really comes to Him will be saved. In 1 Timothy 2:6 we read, "He gave Himself a ransom for all." But only he who goes to God with confession of sins and who in faith accepts the Lord Jesus, has part in His work.

And so it is with the case at hand. When evil is known in the midst of the saints and they refuse to judge it, then they are not cleansed from it, and the Lord cannot be in their midst. 1 John 1:9 applies to this, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There is only forgiveness of those sins that have been confessed. Yet, God made provision for sins of which we are not aware. But he who refuses to confess his sins, has no forgiveness. That is a pertinent principle of God's ways. We find this in the following verses. In them we see that when atonement was to be made for the holy place, the living buck of the goats had to be brought. We already observed that the two goats formed together the sin-offering. In this one we find, therefore, one part of the work of the Lord Jesus. But whereas the first goat presented more particularly His work *for God*, that is to say that the honour and majesty of God was satisfied by Him, here we have the side of the Lord's work *for us*, the side connected with our sins and our consciences. Therefore, we find in verse 21 the remarkable feature that Aaron laid his hands on the head of the goat. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the living goat, and confess over it all the iniquity of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins." Aaron being a type of the Lord Jesus, we see here what He has done on the cross.

How precious in this connection is the principle of no forgiveness without confession. Who confessed all his sins when he was converted? God's Word tells us that all our deeds, words and thoughts before our conversion were only sins. As early as Genesis 6:5 we read, "Every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart (was) only evil continually." Romans 3:12 says, "There is not one that practises goodness, there is not so much as one." I was not very old when I confessed my sins before God, yet I could not remember all my wrong deeds, even less my wrong words and certainly not my wrong thoughts. But all these things are sins according to God's Word. But didn't I receive complete forgiveness at that time or were only those sins I confessed forgiven?

Here we have the beautiful thing: on the cross, the Lord Jesus has confessed *all* my sins: He bore them in His body on the tree — the sins that I committed before my conversion, those which I have done since and those which I, alas, will yet commit as long as I am on earth. As far as He is concerned He did not take care of a certain part of my sins; He knew each one of them. The Lord is true Man, but at the same time He is the eternal God, and as such He knew me even before I existed. He was "the Son of God Who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*" (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, He knew all my sins, from my birth until the moment that I will be removed from the earth. He carried them all, consciously, in His body on the tree. There He confessed all of them, each one by itself, before God. This way, when I went to God and He saw that I was prepared to confess my sins, He put to my account the privilege connected with the work of the Lord Jesus of the forgiveness of *all* my sins, because the Lord Jesus had confessed them all for me. What a glorious fact!

The work of the Lord Jesus is all-sufficient. Here we see where our sins have gone. They have been confessed over the head of the live goat (a type of the Lord Jesus). He bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). This goat was then led into a desert land, while it carried the unrighteousnesses of the people. Where is that? The Lord Jesus has borne all our sins in His body on the cross, and laden with these sins, He died upon the cross. But He arose without all these sins, they remained in the grave and God will never see them again; they have been brought to naught wiped away under the judgment of God.

That is the result of Christ's work for us. As I mentioned, the two bucks of the goats present the work of the Lord Jesus for Israel. The result, however, will only be seen when He comes from heaven. Then all who make up the faithful remnant will pronounce the words of Isaiah 53, for this chapter is the actual speech of this remnant. They will say, He has borne our sins. We find the same thing in Psalm 40. The Lord, speaking about Israel says there, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon Me, so that I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head." The truth presented here also applies to the present day. Nevertheless, we do not have to wait until the Lord Jesus comes from heaven, for we enter the sanctuary with Aaron even today, and there we see the blood, speaking of the work of our Lord. As long as someone has no peace with God, He cannot enter into the sanctuary. Here we find what the two goats signify for us. God has fixed our eyes upon the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit told us that He has died for us. But that is not all: He also rose from among the dead so that our sins remained in the grave. As far as we are concerned, they have disappeared forever.

We do well to read this 21st verse very attentively. Aaron had to "confess over it (the goat) *all* the iniquities of the children of Israel, and *all* their transgressions in *all* their sins." What good would it have been to me if the Lord Jesus had borne only the sins I committed before my conversion, or all my sins up to an hour ago? I would be lost since even one sin is sufficient to lead me to destruction. By one sin Adam and Eve became sinners and were driven from God's presence. No, the Lord Jesus bore *all* our sins and confessed *all* our sins: therefore the Word of God can say that we are clean without interruption.

In the shadow, in the type, this cannot be clearly presented, for the epistle to the Hebrews informs us very clearly that it refers to Israel of those days (10:1-4). As long as the high priest had not come out of the sanctuary, the children of Israel did not know whether or not their sins were forgiven. But from the moment they saw him come out, and the goat was sent to the wilderness, they knew that all their sins had been done away — but only their sins of *that* year! The following year the atonement had to be repeated to bear away the sins of that year. After that they once again were certain that those sins were also taken away.

But the epistle to the Hebrews also tells us how things are for us. The work of the Lord Jesus is so great that it has perfected us forever, in perpetuity (10:14). From the moment I obtained part in the work of the Lord Jesus until eternity, there is not a second in which sin stands between God and me, for Christ underwent the judgment of all my sins. And if I still commit a sin, then He has also borne the judgment of that, so that there is no *eternal* judgment for me, as far as that sin is concerned. It is possible that God in His governmental way has to deal with me, but as far as eternity is concerned, there is no longer any judgment. The consequences of such a sin means that I lose *fellowship* with the *Father* — a serious thing — but the question of sin eternally separating God, the *Creator*, and me, His creature, has been solved forever, and I have become His child through faith. He is now my Father and that relationship cannot be destroyed. But we certainly experience the consequences of sin. "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." He cannot have fellowship with sin, and if I sin, He cannot have fellowship with me although I *am* His child and *remain* His child. Only confession can restore this fellowship. That is added in the first epistle of John. This actually is the end of the Day of Atonement, but I would like to underline the point made in verses 29-31 of this chapter: "And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you. In the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all... for on that day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you: from all your sins shall ye be clean before Jehovah. A sabbath of rest shall it be unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls: it is an everlasting statute."

From this we see what this day was for Israel and what it also will be in the future. From reading the prophecies we learn what will move the hearts of the remnant when they see the Lord Jesus. When we see Him, there will be only joy, and our hearts long for that moment. But for Israel, things will be different. Certainly, they will rejoice in their salvation, but at the very same time it will be for them a day of affliction (Zech. 12:10-14; Isa. 53). They will see that He Whom they rejected and Who had to suffer for their sins was Jehovah Himself, and that will not be a reason for joy.

The Passover is never directly called a *feast* in Scripture. When we are gathered on Lord's Day morning and we are occupied with the suffering of the Lord Jesus, seeing what He had to endure as a result of our sins, it is also not a time for joy. Then we humbly bend our hearts: these are the bitter herbs of the Passover. We find the same thoughts in the Gospels. In Matthew 13:20-21, the Lord explains it. Someone who receives the word of the kingdom with joy, has not really repented. It isn't a pleasant message to tell anyone that he is lost; therefore conversion is not a matter of joy. There is joy *in heaven* says the Lord in Luke 15:7, but for man it is different. To acknowledge that we are sinners and lost, is no reason for joy; nor is the fact that we were so corrupt that the Lord Jesus had to die for us. Joy only arises when we see the results of His work, but not at the occasion of our conversion itself, nor when we are occupied with what the Lord has suffered for our sakes. And so it will be with Israel.

It is good to ponder these things. We often admire Him and worship Him, being occupied with His suffering on Lord's Day morning and during the preaching of the gospel; but we only experience joy when we see what has become our share as a result of His work. We meet to announce His death, and how good it is for us to be filled with Him, to think of the price He has paid, of the suffering that was His part. These things lead us to worship. But worship is not the same thing as joy. When these things fill our hearts, we are not unhappy, but we are serious. With this reverence and this worship we turn to Him with our hymns of praise. In these thoughts we notice the distinction between joy and worship.

*To be cont'd*

#### QUOTE

If my soul has bowed to Christ — if I have listened to Him — if I have learnt from Him, owning that I was lost, then I have a portion in *life* that settles every question of judgment. There is a judgment, sure and inevitable, for man; but it is altogether outside this *eternal life*. I must be in the one place or the other, either raised in the resurrection of *life*, or in that of judgment. I cannot have a portion in both.

*J.N.D.*