

THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED (2)

Chapter 2

THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD — WHEN DID IT BEGIN? WHO BELONGS TO IT?

God has put the believers into fellowship with each other: "God maketh the solitary into families (Ps. 68:6).

An example of this from the Old Testament

An example of this we see with the children of Israel in the wilderness. "For all that has been written before has been written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4). They were the people of God and their centre of meeting in the wilderness was the tabernacle, God's dwelling. The blessing of every Israelite personally depended on his maintaining contact with the tabernacle, and remaining at the place that was meant for him among all the tribes of Israel: to the east, to the west, to the north or to the south of the tabernacle. He was not allowed to go and dwell or journey where and when it suited him.

The pillar of cloud led him. When the pillar of cloud lifted and moved on, the whole nation had to go on. There was no blessing for the individual if he did not remain with the entire nation, for Israel was encamped around the tabernacle with the pillar of cloud. In other words: The Lord's presence was their protection and the pillar of cloud pointed them the way through the wilderness.

We should know this well: not the nation as a whole was the protection and guide for Israel, but only the Lord who dwelled in their midst. For us too there is the danger that we consider the fellowship of the brothers and sisters to be higher than the presence of the Lord. Only when the brothers and sisters are in fellowship with the Lord can the Lord bless.

This brings us from the type to the antitype; from the tabernacle in the wilderness in the Old Testament, to the Assembly of God in the New Testament where the Lord also dwells in the midst of His people.

When did the Church, the Assembly, come into existence?

The Assembly of God came into existence when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer individually, He joins them with the Lord in heaven, who is the Head of the Assembly, His body. He joins them with each other as members of the one body on earth.

The believers in the Old Testament do not belong to the Assembly

It should be clear to everyone that the believers of the Old Testament do not belong to the Church. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus says: "On this rock I *will* build My Assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it." With "this rock" is meant the Person of which Peter's confession speaks: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). "I will build" is future. When the Lord spoke these words He had not yet begun building. When He had finished the work of redemption, after He was risen and had ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit was poured out on the twelve apostles, the Lord began to build His Assembly. The Head had to be *in heaven* before there could be a body on earth.

In Ephesians 1:19-20 we see how Christ was raised from among the dead by the power of God and that He is now seated at God's right hand in the heavenlies, above all authority, power, might, and dominion, and that God has given Him "to be Head over all things to the Assembly, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." And in 1 Corinthians 12:13 we read: "For also in [the power of] one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit."

Ephesians 2:20 teaches us that the Assembly is built on *the foundation* of apostles and prophets. The saints of the Old Testament were there before the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Thus the Assembly can never be built on the Old Testament saints. In Old Testament times the Assembly did therefore not as yet exist.

From all this, it is clear that the Old Testament saints did not belong to the Assembly. Yet they are blessed with the blessings belonging to that dispensation. It is clear that the Assembly of God has begun on the day of Pentecost and not before.

The Assembly will be complete at the second coming of the Lord

Also the believers who will live during the time after the second coming of the Lord, after the Assembly has been taken up, don't belong to the Assembly. "Christ also loved the Assembly and has given Himself for her, that He would sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the Word, that He might present the Assembly before Himself glorious, without blame or wrinkle, but that she should be holy and perfect" (Eph. 5:25-27). This putting of the Assembly before Him will take place after the second coming of the Lord. There will be great numbers of men who will be saved after the Assembly is taken up, but they will belong to the group of believers who will enter the Millennium here on earth, over whom Christ will reign a thousand years.

If we fail to see the dispensation of the Assembly clearly, there will always be confusion when we seek to understand the Scriptures. We should never confound Israel and the Assembly. The Assembly came into existence on the day of Pentecost and she will be taken up at the second coming of the Lord.

The Assembly of God consists only of true believers

The Assembly of God consists only of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, of those who have heard the gospel of their salvation, have believed it, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 1:13). Nowhere in Scripture do we find, nor is it possible, that persons who only confess, without true faith, have a place in the body of Christ. The body of Christ is living and real.

It is true that Scripture has foretold that the falling away would soon begin and that the condition in Christendom would become so terrible that the "confessing Christians" who have not been born again, would increase in number. Unfortunately it is true that such persons have received a place in the confessing church of God on earth, but they are not members of the body of Christ, of the true Church, the true Assembly.

In the parable of the darnel among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-30), we see how the enemy has begun his work, how he has given confessors a place among the true believers. In verse 39 we see what the darnel represents: "These are the sons of the evil one." And the enemy who sows the weed "is the devil."

Scripture teaches nowhere that believers can go together with unbelievers; especially not in a church fellowship.

Unbelievers have no right to partake of the Lord's Supper

It is entirely contrary to the Bible that an unbeliever would partake of the Lord's Supper. It isn't sufficient that one is a pretty careful member of the congregation, and that one has been confirmed. One must be converted, one must truly believe in the Lord Jesus to be able to partake of the Supper. The following words are spoken to true Christians: "Whosoever shall eat the bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty in respect of the body and of the blood of the Lord. For [the] eater and drinker eats and drinks judgment to himself, not distinguishing the body. On this account many among you [are] weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 11:27-30). When unworthily eating and drinking is so serious for a Christian who walks according to the flesh, what must it be for an unbeliever?

No Christian with any insight in God's Word will be able to remain in a fellowship of faith where it is knowingly allowed that one partakes of the Lord's Supper solely on the basis of a confession.

The Assembly of God has no geographical, national, or sectarian boundaries

The Assembly of God consists of all true believers wherever they may live, to whatever nationality they belong, whatever may be their social standing. We read: "Therein is neither Greek nor Jew (no national distinctions), circumcision nor uncircumcision (no religious distinctions): but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11). In the Assembly at Colosse there was a Philemon and his slave Onesimus, "a brother beloved." Thus we see that grace triumphs over the distinctions that exist in the world, which are acknowledged by God, but which are without value, completely falling away in the Assembly of God.

It is also self-evident that the Assembly of God, which is one, is not limited by nationalities. It is not Scriptural to give the Assembly names that remind of a particular country, particular persons, or particular doctrines, or which describe a certain church order. A Christian who has some insight in the Word of God, and who has the desire to be obedient to God's will, cannot join an ecclesiastical fellowship bearing such a name.

What a liberty for the soul to know that one is only joined to the one Assembly of God, that one does not bear any name than the name of the Lord, that one has no creed or man-made church order but that one is guided solely by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, that one, to say it in short, belongs merely to the fellowship to which all Christians have been called.

The Assembly of God is not of this world

This is very clear from Scripture. Twice the Lord says of His disciples: "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:14,16). Why does the Lord say so twice? I suppose it is to really stress these words. The apostle Peter speaks about the believers as "strangers and sojourners" (1 Pet. 2:11). While Paul writes that "our citizenship is in the heavens" (Phil. 3:20). And John: "The world knows us not, because it knew Him not" (1 Jn. 3:1).

Therefore any link between church and state, and all striving of the church for political power, is contrary to the character of Christianity. Such efforts show great ignorance regarding the true nature of God, and the Church's connection with Christ and its heavenly calling. Regarding these things we should be zealous with the zeal of God (cf. Ex. 34:12-14).

To be cont'd

THE PROBLEM OF THE UNANSWERED PRAYER (2)

—J. Rouw

In Deuteronomy 3:23-27 we read something about unanswered prayer. "I besought Jehovah at that time, saying, Lord Jehovah, Thou hast begun to shew Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy powerful hand; for what God is in the heavens or in the earth that can do like to Thy works, and like to Thy might? let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But Jehovah was wroth with me on your account, and did not hear me; and Jehovah said to me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter! Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

Later I will refer to a few more portions dealing with unanswered prayers. As far as I know, we find it here for the first time. A great man of God, a servant of God, Moses, had been faithful to God during his whole life. He was quick-tempered, but God had made a meek man of him, the meekest, man living on earth.

Once God gave water out of the rock after Moses had struck the rock. God caused a stream of water to come out of the rock so that all the people of Israel could drink. That stream followed them, it became a river that flowed through the wilderness during their forty-year wilderness journey. The rock from which the water flowed is a picture of Christ so the New Testament tells us. It was normal water that came out of it, but in 1 Corinthians 10 it says: "Now the rock was the Christ." That means that the Lord Jesus is the Rock that has been struck. And because the Lord Jesus has been struck by God on the cross, there is living water flowing from Him to quench the thirst of millions! Moses had struck the rock and the water had flowed. But at the end of the wilderness journey (Num. 20) we read that the water had ceased to flow.

They were nearly in the promised land, when God held the water back, and the people began to murmur. But God said to Moses: "Take the staff... speak ye unto the rock... and it shall give its water." Moses, angry because the people murmured, took his staff and struck the rock twice. That was wrong! He was disobedient and hot-tempered. Then God told Moses that he was not allowed to enter the land, he had to stay in the wilderness to die there.

Why did he get such a severe punishment? One might think, "Wasn't it a bit too harsh?" Do you know why? Because the rock was a picture of Christ and meant symbolically: The Lord Jesus has been struck once, once He was put to death, and thereby the work was finished for ever!

Sufficient for eternity! For every man, for every one who comes, for every one who will. Moses struck a second time and that would symbolically mean: the Lord Jesus must die again. But then His work on the cross was not sufficient! Moses made the work of the Lord Jesus look worthless. This caused God to be so terribly angry. We see from this that obedience to God is most important, even if we don't understand it. And God said to Moses: 'Moses, you brought the people to the Jordan, to the boundary. They may go through the Jordan into the promised land, but you won't enter it.'

Then Moses began to pray: "Lord Jehovah, let me go over and see that good land." But the Lord said: "Speak no more to Me of this matter" (Dt. 3:23-26).

We shouldn't think: 'How hard is God at times.' The most important lesson here is this: When God does not answer a prayer, then He gives us something else, then He gives us something better. I am afraid there are believers who say: 'God did not answer my prayer for this one who was seriously ill, or for that disappointment, or for this great desire I had in my life. It didn't take place. Whether I received something better instead remains a question to me.' Yet many have also testified: 'God did not answer my prayer, but He gave me something else instead that was infinitely better!'

Now back to Moses for a moment, 'Moses climb that mountain!' So Moses climbed the mountain. God went with him and said, 'Now I will show you something...; you may not enter the land, but now you will have a panorama of the entire land of Canaan.' Then God opened his eyes (Dt. 34:4) so that he saw the land from the north to the south, from the east to the west; he saw it as never a man did, so beautiful. I even believe, as nice and perfect as it will be later, when the Lord Jesus will reign there. Moses received an unforgettable present of God. He was allowed to see it ahead of time. Israel is at the moment in a semi-wilderness, though they make it pretty nice. But in the future, during Christ's reign of peace, it will be marvelous. And that is how Moses saw it. Then Moses died there, high up on the mountain, and God buried him there. Did you ever hear of a man who was buried by God? That is Moses. He had the nicest burial possible: buried by God. But the nicest thing is still to come. In the New Testament (Mt. 17) we read that the Lord Jesus is on the mount of transfiguration, a high mountain. On that mountain the Lord is with three disciples, Peter, James, and John. Then, suddenly, the clothing of the Lord begins to radiate and His face starts to shine as the sun in its power. The Lord Jesus is being glorified! Heavenly, divine glory. And then, suddenly, there appear two persons who lived long ago in the Old Testament: Moses and Elias. And the wonderful thing is that on that mountain, in the midst of the land, with the Lord Jesus in glory, Moses has been in the land anyway. But that is infinitely more beautiful than walking through the streets of Jerusalem. Glorified with the Lord Jesus on the mountain, a foretaste of the eternal joy! In it we see the grace of God. This is an example showing how God works when He does not answer prayer.

To be cont'd

THE GLORY OF THE FATHER AND THE SON (3)

—H. Rossier

John 17:1-4

In John 11 and 12 we saw in the testimonies which God gave of Christ His future glorification as Son of God, as King of Israel and as Son of man. Afterwards we saw in chapter 13 His present glorification as Son of man on the cross. In John 17 we see Him glorified as the Son of the Father. In this chapter the disciples have the invaluable privilege to hear the conversation the Son has with the Father regarding them. These believers, who in themselves were so weak and so ignorant, learn here that they are the subjects of the care and love of the Father and the Son. The Son desires on the one hand that His own be introduced into that relationship in which He Himself stands to the Father, and, on the other hand, that they vis-a-vis the world are introduced into the position that He is now leaving because He is returning to the Father. But He leaves them in that position here below to be a testimony of Him and of the Father in His stead.

"These things Jesus spoke, and lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, *the hour is come.*" Not as in chapter 12: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified," or as in chapter 13 "His hour... that He should depart out of this world to the Father," but simply: "The hour has come." The cross is a completed fact of which only the immediate result still must be fulfilled. "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son." It is not as in chapter 13 the glorification of the Son of man on the cross, but that of the *Son to introduce Him into the glory of the Father.*

"Glorify Thy Son," He says; but why? "That Thy Son may glorify Thee." Does He think of Himself? No, He has but one purpose, namely to enter into glory, but not for Himself, but so that He can glorify the Father! And what glorifies the Father is that the Son — who, when glorified, receives from the Father power and the right to exercise authority over all flesh — uses His power to give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him. He ascends to the Father in glory so that He might give us eternal life!

Eternal life! This Gospel and the Epistles of the same apostle instruct us about it. The Lord gives it to us on the basis of faith in Him; it is in us the fruit of the gift of the Holy Spirit whom He has sent from glory. This life brings us into relationship with the Father, it enables us to know the Father and to enjoy communion with Him. Just as Jesus had glorified the Father on earth and accomplished His work on the cross, *so He glorifies now the Father in glory*. By giving us eternal life, He introduces us into the relationship in which He Himself stands to the Father, for it is His own life that He shares with us. In this way the Son glorifies the Father.

But a little further on in this chapter, we find something else of great significance for us, the redeemed of the Lord! The Son is not only glorified in heaven to introduce His own there into all the blessings of His position before the Father, but during His absence He also wants to be glorified on earth in His own whom He has sent into the world. He says: "I am glorified in them" (v. 10). He desires that His character, His perfections will be seen here on earth in His own, that the world may believe that the Father has sent His Son into the world (v. 21). And when we will be "perfected into one," we will be seen with Him in glory (v. 23), then the world must acknowledge that the Father has sent His Son and that He has loved us with the same love wherewith He loved the Lord Jesus.

Do we sufficiently appreciate the privilege of being the bearers in this world of the glory of the Son in heaven? When in a little the Lord will return with His own, He will "be glorified in His saints, and wondered at in all that have believed... in that day" (2 Th. 1:10). But He does not want to wait for that moment to be glorified in us only then. He desires that His name will be glorified here below even now, just as we have been glorified in Him before the Father (2 Th. 1:12). Oh, that we would better understand this, and so truly represent Him here on earth that we would be epistles of Christ, known and read by all men!

"And now," the Lord says, "glorify Me, Thou Father, along with Thyself, with the glory which I had along with Thee before the world was" (v. 5). Here we find the third "now." We saw the "now" from before the cross (12:27), the wonderful "now" of the cross (13:31), and here we have the eternal "now" of the glory.

The Lord had glorified the Father on earth and finished the work that He had given Him to do. He had completely revealed the Father, while being Man here on earth, *that* was the work that He had to do. But also towards us He has finished all that was needed: salvation has been obtained, the sins have been atoned, the power of Satan has been brought to nought, the veil is rent giving us free access into the sanctuary.

Wasn't it a righteous reward that the Father now glorified the Lord Jesus Christ, come in flesh, along with Himself with the glory He had as Son with the Father from all eternity? That is His personal portion, the only thing He did not share with us, because He alone could possess this. On the basis of His work He is worthy to re-enter His own glory with the Father, in the glory that He as Son of the Father possessed from all eternity, but now *without ever laying off His Manhood!*

All His glories we will share, but that glory we will see. We will see *His* glory, the glory that the Father has given Him on the basis of His obedience (v. 24). We shall rejoice in it and worship the Lamb that stands alone in the midst of the throne, and it will be a greater joy for us to praise *this* glory than to rejoice in our own glory, no matter how glorious and exalted our position may be around Him according to the words: "And the glory which Thou has given Me I have given them" (v. 22).

What will it be to dwell with Thee,
Within Thy Father's house, Oh Lord!
Where Thou of suffering Thy crown wilt see:
Of power and might — by all adored.
We'll bend our knees, we'll see Thy face,
And, bowed in worship, sing Thy praise.

The End

73. SOLOMON'S SPLENDOR. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA. SOLOMON FORSAKES GOD. SOLOMON'S DEATH. — 1 Kings 9:1-11:43; 2 Chronicles 9

Outline

1. The Lord Appears to Solomon 1 Ki. 9:1-9
2. The Queen of Sheba 1 Ki. 10:1-13; 2 Chr. 9:1-12 142
3. Solomon's Splendor 1 Ki. 9:10-28; 10:14-29; 2 Chr. 9:13-28
4. His Turning Away 1 Ki. 11

Explanation

1. God promises to do as Solomon has asked and dwell in the temple. He promises Solomon that he will always have a son upon the throne of Israel. But God makes this conditional upon his continuing with God. If Solomon would serve other gods, God would cut off Israel.
2. The Queen of Sheba, who had heard of Solomon's fame in connection with the name of Jehovah, traveled to prove Solomon's acts, wisdom (v. 6), and wealth (9:5).
3. Solomon was the wealthiest and most powerful man on the earth in his day (2 Chr. 9:26).
4. Solomon was turned away from following the Lord by his idolatrous wives.

Lesson

Sheba (blessed Arabia) was counted among the most prosperous countries of the earth. How great must Solomon's prosperity have been if he amazed the Queen of Sheba! (Mt. 12:42). She is a picture of the nations in the Millennium (Isa. 60:6).

Solomon introduced idolatry to please his heathen wives (Dt. 17:17-20), human affection took precedence over affection to the Lord. As lovely as the beginning, so sad was the end of his reign! Jehovah had foretold the judgment; Solomon is a warning example for every believer (1 Cor. 10:12).

74. THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM. REHOBAM. — 1 Kings 12:1-24; 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 12

Outline

1. Departure of the Ten Tribes 1 Ki. 12:1-20
2. Rehoboam 1 Ki. 14:21-24
3. Invasion of Shishak 1 Ki. 14:25-31; 2 Chr. 12 143

Explanation

1. Rehoboam's self-willed, proud behaviour led to the division. Rehoboam, ignoring the advice of his father's counselors, heeded the counsel of his youthful advisors. As a result the people of Israel rebelled, ten of the twelve tribes turned aside and only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to him.
2. Rehoboam was ready to go to war over the division, but God forbade it, and he listened. Yet, he soon began to allow idol worship. His reign was marked by idolatry, immorality and war, later he humbled himself before the Lord.
3. Shishak, king of Egypt took the cities of Judah and his armies looted God's house and the king's palace.

Lesson

The judgment over Israel announced to Solomon came swift, already under his son Rehoboam. God allowed it because of idol-worship. God made use of the envy between Israel (mainly Ephraim - see Isa. 11:13) and Judah.

In His judgment God allowed the treasures of the house of Jehovah and the king's house to be robbed. When Rehoboam humbled himself, God granted him a temporary deliverance (1 Pet. 5:5). God still saw good in Israel.

Some kings reigning over Judah (the two tribes) were God-fearing, but all the kings over Israel or Ephraim (the ten tribes) were godless men. In the history of the kings we see the seriousness of God's holy government and God's ways.

To be cont'd