

## The Church of Your Choice (2)

—J. van Dijk

*In the previous issue the author dealt with the perplexing problems faced by those who seek Christian fellowship on the basis of what the Bible teaches us. He now continues in a more positive direction, concluding that there is a path that does justice to what Scripture teaches.*

### *The One Body*

The Church is the body of Christ; there is one body (Eph. 4:4) which has Christ as Head (Col. 1:18). Our actions must give expression to these truths. Now the creeds of all denominations either exclude some who do belong to the body of Christ, and (or) include others who do not belong to it. Besides, they expect you to become a member. But all who believe in Christ as their personal Saviour are already members of His body! Scripture never speaks of another membership.

There almost seems no choice but to remain by oneself. But when we read Hebrews 10:25, we are told that we are not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some; but encouraging one another, and by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near." So to stay alone is not the answer either. A godly solution will certainly be based on the Word of God. So we must avoid the wrong of denominations, and meet with other Christians in a way that acknowledges the oneness of the body and the headship of Christ.

Now suppose that we begin to meet with others. Can we now claim to be *the Church*, the body of Christ? The answer is obviously, No! For many who belong to the body of Christ will not be of one mind with us and remain in the denominations. To call it *the Church*, would be like saying, "We are of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). It cannot even be called *a church*, for Scripture knows only one Church; nor can we adopt a name, for then we become a denomination.

What then is it? Rather than being an assembly, or a church that is the one body, we meet *on the basis of the one body*, acknowledging Christ as our Head. Rather than *becoming* members of something new, we come together simply because we *are* members of Christ's body. Every true member of the body of Christ we should receive as such. In this way we would not form a new denomination, but remain simply individual Christians who meet *on the basis of the Church*, the one body with Christ as Head. We can meet this way in the Name of the Lord Jesus, for the basis is entirely in keeping with the Word of God. We also may claim the promise the Lord made in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." How precious it is to know that the Lord will be in our midst.

### *Christ, the One Head*

Now let us move on. Suppose there are elsewhere some Christians who follow the same path, what would our relationship be to them? The answer is found in the basis on which we meet — the one body. All who meet on the same basis should relate to each other as the first churches did. Only so do we acknowledge that there is one body, one Head. Scripture leaves us no choice but to recognize them as being gathered on the same ground.

But this has consequences. If they receive or remove someone from among their midst, we have to realize that they do so under the leading of their Head, our Head, Christ. And as long as we acknowledge those in another community to be truly gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus, we must accept their judgment. The direct result of the Headship of Christ and the oneness of the body is the interdependence of all who are gathered on that basis worldwide. This is clearly presented in Acts 15. The question as to law-keeping by the Gentile believers was not decided independently by each assembly. No, it was decided at Jerusalem, in an assembly that (so some might have argued) had nothing to do with the question. Both this collective approach and the subject matter show very clearly that the body is one and acts as one. Only physical realities separate us from each other. The Lord shows us to be spiritually one in every aspect of Christian life. Local assemblies are not independent, for all assemblies are part of the same body and depend on the same Head.

### *Assembly Activities*

Now that we have seen the basis on which we can meet, we come to the question of what to do when we meet. In Acts 2:42 we read that the believers "persevered in the *teaching* and *fellowship* of the apostles, in *breaking of bread* and *prayers*." The purposes for meeting are clearly spelled out.

We need to pray in the first place for ourselves, for we are always vulnerable to departure from what God has given. But our prayer should also encompass all who are named by the name of the Lord, all who belong to the Church (Eph. 6:18). Besides, we should pray for this world and its governments (1 Tim. 2:1-2). There are many needs: family relationships — the evils of divorce and abortion; education — the public schools are becoming more and more anti-Christian (Eph. 6:4b). In all areas we need wisdom from God to know how to act in a Christ-honouring manner. There is plenty to pray for!

As to the breaking of bread, we have the instruction in God's Word, "As *often* as ye shall eat this bread, or drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, till He come." The tense used to refer to the breaking of bread in Acts 20:7 conveys the sense that this took place regularly on the first day of the week.

The same verse also speaks of the meeting for teaching. First Corinthians 14:26-33 speaks more specifically about this meeting, but verse 26 begins with giving instructions on the form all meetings should have, the "liturgy" if you will. "Whenever ye come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue (a foreign language), has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done to edification." No single individual has a predetermined task, be it giving out of hymns or giving exhortations; all may come from any brother present. The only restriction is that all be done to edification.

Instructive too is what we read in vv. 29-32. "Let two or three prophets speak." Since Paul wrote to set things right in Corinth, I take this to be a maximum, just as Matthew 18:20 is obviously a minimum. What Paul presents here would become impossible if we were to appoint someone to preach. It is also clear that any speaker needs to be very sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, for when there is a revelation (by the Spirit) to another sitting there, the first one is to be silent. When one speaks under the guidance of the Spirit of God, he will not forget himself and resort to unintelligent utterances, for the spirits of the prophets remain subject to the prophets at all times. God is a God of order!

Our intelligent God caused Paul to write this immediately after prescribing a manner of conduct for the assembly that most have set aside as unworkable. But man's order is God's disorder. Only by following the instructions given here can we indeed fulfil the task God has given us: to show to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies the all-various wisdom of God. The Queen of Sheba had no spirit left in her when she saw the conduct of Solomon's servants.

### *Assembly Structure*

So far we have looked at the conduct within the meetings. As we have seen, there was no role for ministers as they are generally known today. This of course does not mean that there are no ministers, but there are no appointed or professional individuals, but only brothers who are equipped by God, and chosen by Him for the particular occasion to expound God's Word to the company. Even the appointment of a minister for one meeting is unknown to Scripture. God wants us to wait for what He will reveal at that moment (1 Cor. 14:30). The only time we read of choosing of teachers is in an admonition warning against this practice (2 Tim. 4:3).

Now let us take a look at elders. Several places in Scripture speak of their *appointment*, this is always on the initiative of the apostles. Never was an assembly allowed to *elect* its elders. This is sufficient to keep us from doing so. It will soon be clear to whom the Lord gives insight in His Word. It behooves all to pay attention to such. Yet, though some may at one time be used to show us the path to follow, there is no guarantee that the same persons will do so next time. Today God's Word guides us, giving us a great advantage over the early church, for the Word of God affords a much surer guidance than any elder could ever give.

### *Conclusion*

These are some of the things to be considered when one is interested in finding the "Church of God's choice." Of course, there are many important aspects of Christian life we have not looked at, but the ones we reviewed concern the corporate details of church-life. When these are not in keeping with the truth of Scripture, no degree of improvement in the practical behaviour of the participating Christians will bring about a structure that is compatible with God's Word. If we want to be right as to these, we must remember that principles come before practice, and practice should never deny principles.

Several Christians have gone through exercises like these when they discovered how contrary to Scripture the divisions in the church are. Today there are Christians throughout the world who follow this path. They may be hard to find since they are relatively few and do not take a denominational name, but they are there. We like to encourage any reader who realizes that the exercises of these brethren were scriptural to pray God that He may lead you to others that understand these things, so that you may together glorify God in following His design for the Church of God. What you have found then is not *the Church of your choice*, but:

THE CHURCH OF GOD'S CHOICE.

*The End*

## **The Prophecy of Joel (1)**

—R. Been Sr.

### *Introduction*

The main theme of Joel's prophecy is *the attack of the Assyrian*, the King of the North, *at the end of days*. That attack is symbolically portrayed by an all-consuming plague of locusts. In those days all the power of many nations will rise in open enmity against God and all that is His. This calls for the intervention of Jehovah. At the appearance of the Son of man in power and great glory, the might of the nations will be destroyed in the valley of Jehoshaphat. His prophecy also deals with *the outpouring of the Holy Spirit* over all flesh at the establishing of Christ's Kingdom. Then everyone who will call on the name of the Lord, everyone who will repent of his evil ways, will be saved — not be taken away by death — and enter into the blessing of Christ's kingdom.

The prophecy of Hosea spoke mainly about Israel, the ten-tribe nation (although it did not ignore the future of Judah, the two-tribe nation); the prophecy of Joel refers only to Judah and Jerusalem. Proof of this is found in the last chapter of Joel, which mentions the time in which the Lord will turn the lot of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1); judgment will come over the enemies who had sold their people to the Greeks (3:6-8). Judah shall abide for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation (3:20). Besides this, Joel often mentions the temple and mount Zion (1:9,13,14,16, 2:17; 2:1,15,23,32, 3:17). All this clearly proves that the prophet spoke of Judah and Jerusalem.

In Joel's prophecy the most prominent enemy of Judah and Jerusalem is the Assyrian. In the past, the Assyrian had been instrumental in the demise of the ten-tribe nation and the exile of its people. Yet, he had never been able to conquer the two-tribe nation, not because the strength of Judah and Jerusalem were so great, but because Jehovah protected this nation and its city. In Hezekiah's days the army of the Assyrian was decisively beaten by an angel of the Lord. The greatest enemy of Judah and Jerusalem in past days was therefore not the Assyrian, but Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The latter destroyed the two-tribe nation, and carried their people away to Babylon. Yet, the prophecy of Joel does not speak of Babel. This is because "Babel" will not be a military power in the last days, but rather a religious system. In his prophecy, Joel sees the *prophetic Assyrian*, who in the last days will indeed turn against Judah and Jerusalem as their great enemy, conquering them, be it only for a short time. The power of the Assyrian in the last days will be much greater than that of the historic one. The prophetic Assyrian will be strong and mighty, but through the power of another, Russia (Dan. 8:24).

### *The day of the Lord*

This is indeed the subject occupying Joel. His prophecy could even carry that title. The day of the Lord is not a twenty-four hour period, but a period of numerous and visible judgments which of necessity precede the blessings of the thousand-year peaceful reign of Christ. The purpose of these judgments at the end of days is:

1. to glorify the name of God which has been dishonoured through the behaviour of man and especially of His earthly people, Israel;
2. to bring low the pride of the nations that exalt themselves against Him (Obad. 15; Isa. 2:12-19);
3. and to teach righteousness to the inhabitants of the world (Isa. 26:9).

It will be:

4. a day of terror over them who have sinned against the Lord (Zeph. 1:14-18);
5. a day of destruction (Isa. 13:6-9);

6. a day of vengeance, divine recompence (Isa. 61:2; 63:4);
7. a day of wrath (Zeph. 2:2);
8. and a day of darkness (Amos 5:20).
9. The judgments in the end time are meted out by the Lord Himself. This is why it is called the day of the Lord. None but Christ Himself will do so, for "God... has set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the Man whom He has appointed" (Acts 17:31).
10. These judgments will come over the entire inhabited earth (Rev. 3:10);
11. but Joel's prophecy only mentions the judgments over Judah and Jerusalem, just as in Zechariah 12-14.
12. The purpose of these judgments of the Lord is establishing of Christ's thousand-year reign of peace, and the deliverance, and restoration of all Israel. The people who remain after the judgments will enjoy the blessings of the Millennium.
13. In the Second Epistle of Peter, a slightly different significance is given to the "day of the Lord."

The day of the Lord will begin before the establishment of the Millennium, the day of God follows it. After the Millennium is completed, heaven and earth will pass away, and the works on earth will be burned up. Then comes the "day of God," the new heaven and the new earth in which dwells righteousness. Now in the Second Epistle of Peter, the day of the Lord comes to an end at the passing away of heaven and earth, after which the day of God begins (2 Pet. 3:10-13). In the Old Testament, however, the day of the Lord ends with the establishment of the Millennium — Christ's reign of peace.

In their visions, the prophets of the Old Testament never see as far as the day of God; the establishing of Christ's glorious kingdom is always the prophetic end. When they speak of an "eternal" realm, then this doesn't mean more than the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. The word "eternal" has in this connection the significance of "after this realm, no other follows." Besides this, Scripture establishes the duration of that realm at a thousand years (Rev. 20:4), it also teaches us that it will have an end (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

## *Chapter 1*

### *Verses 1-4*

The first question that comes before us is, When did Joel prophecy? We know nothing further about the prophet than what Scripture gives us here. He is the son of Pethuel. Joel does not mention any kings under whose reign he prophesied as so many other prophets do. Nor does his prophecy, as others, hint at any events from which we would be able to deduct the time of his prophecy. In this regard Hosea was quite different; he mentioned several facts and conditions he had experienced. The only event mentioned by Joel in these verses are the rapidly successive plagues of palmerworms, locusts, cankerworms, and caterpillars, but none of the other prophecies mention them and consequently we don't know when they occurred (1:4). Some have identified these insect-plagues with the four incursions of the Assyrian in the country of Judah. This claim, however, cannot be substantiated, and strains Joel's prophecy.

### *Verses 5-14*

Joel considered these natural catastrophes to be a judgment from God and a serious call to repentance for the nation. He used them to point to yet greater judgments, not natural disasters but punishments directly from God, which would come in the day of the Lord. He stirred up the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to consider whether such a catastrophe had ever occurred in their days or in the days of their forefathers, so that they might see it as a special judgment from God. They had to tell it to their children, and those in turn to the following generations. In this way the prophet sought to keep the memory of this plague alive, especially because of the call for repentance that it contained. Isaiah 24 greatly resembles Joel 1. Both chapters deal with the serious destruction in the land, the ruin of its prosperity resulting from the sins of its inhabitants.

Throughout the ages God has sought to speak to the consciences of men through all kinds of natural and man-made disasters. When there is no heeding of His Word, the warning voice of God comes to men through serious events. So it has been in respect to Israel, the Church, and the world. But when men do not even listen to the serious voice of disasters, and do not turn to God, then they seal their own fate. If Judah and Jerusalem had taken the voice of the locust plague to heart and turned to God, it would not have been necessary for the Lord to let the king of Babel come down upon His people as a disciplinary rod. And just as it has come down upon Israel, so it will upon the Christian nations, yes, upon the entire world.

Verse 4 speaks of four kinds of insects. Some translations mention four different kinds, others four forms of locusts in the different stages of development; the first is a young locust without wings, then comes a completely developed one with

wings, and two more. In total there were nine sorts of locusts, but those mentioned in verse 4 were the most dangerous, bringing the greatest devastation.

The locusts which had earlier hit Egypt was the Arbeh, the type that is completely developed. The plague referred to by Joel was unique, for various kinds of locusts swarmed over the land of Judah year after year, thereby devastating the land, and drying up its sources of prosperity.

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon, mentioning a locust plague, had prayed that the Lord would forgive its sins and stop the plague if the nation would come to its senses and recognize its sin (2 Chr. 6:28-30). In answer, the Lord had spoken to Solomon and stressed humiliation and repentance (2 Chr. 7:12-14). But in Joel's days Israel did not repent.

The prophet Amos noticed the uselessness of the plagues over the ten tribes, since they had not returned to God (Amos 4:9). In that chapter this is noticed after every disaster. Later, when the Lord wanted to send locusts, Amos interceded for the nation. What would remain of Jacob; he was already so small. The Lord then answered that the plague would not be. Herein we see how the mediation of one man of God held off the destruction of the land (Amos 7:1-3).

In the future the fate of Israel will depend in a similar way on one Person, Christ, of whom Amos was a type. After the intervention of Amos, God in His grace had not sent the plague of locusts. But in Joel's days the nation did not return to God when the plague hit them year after year. And so, some years later, the people went into captivity to Babel. In the future God, in grace, will bring about repentance in the heart of the remnant.

When in years gone by, God had sent locusts over Egypt, there had been an outward display as if Pharaoh's hardened heart was humbled by the severity of the plague. Although he confessed to have sinned against the Lord and Israel, he was nevertheless determined not to let the people go (Ex. 10:12-20). Yet, it is remarkable that even this outward humbling of Pharaoh caused the plague to be removed. God certainly knew the intent of Pharaoh, but He is long-suffering and merciful, ever prepared to pay attention to the least sign of acknowledgement of sin. God's purpose with disasters like these is always to reach hearts and consciences so that He can bless. To this end no disaster is too heavy.

Joel too sought to reach the hearts and consciences of the people. In verse 2 he admonished them to hear, in verse 5 to wake up. He told the wine drinkers, who could no longer get wine, to weep and cry. The locusts, the mighty nation that devours everything, had caused the vine to become desolate, even the fig-tree had been barked. And so it is today. When disasters strike the earth, man needs to pay attention, needs to discern the calling voice of God; man needs to wake up and come to his senses.

In verse 8 an even greater loss is mentioned than the loss of harvest. God no longer maintained His link with His people. The nation is compared to a mourning virgin who has lost her fiancé. Because the locusts had robbed the nation of all prosperity, oblations and drink-offerings could no longer be brought in the house of the Lord. The priests, the servants of Jehovah, mourned over this. The grain harvest was wasted, the new wine dried up, the fruit-trees bore no longer fruit, the fig-tree languished. All happiness had departed from man. God had removed all joy. Man is very sensitive to the loss of such earthly blessings, for they have been the desire of all man since the fall of Adam. Every hope of finding comfort in God's nearness was lost. So often they had despised Him. And, besides, what had they to offer Him? Nothing was left. A priesthood without sacrifice is useless. Could one approach God empty-handed?

Only one way remained open to the people, the way of repentance. But that they didn't want at all. The prophet Isaiah pointed to the uselessness of further plagues. Why should the people be smitten any more? (Isa. 1:5). They endured these plagues murmuring and weeping, for they couldn't do anything about them. To humble themselves in repentance just didn't enter their mind. Isn't that the way it will be in the end-time? Don't we read that in those days men will not repent, despite the terrible judgments which will cause them to gnaw their tongues with distress? (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:10-11).

Yet, the prophet stirred them up to sanctify themselves, to proclaim a fast, a day of solemn assembly. He called on the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to assemble themselves in the house of the Lord, there to cry to Him whom they had despised and rejected, to call upon Him in their deepest distress. But who could stand before Him, if He were to remember the iniquity among them? (Ps. 103:3). Isn't it the same today? When disaster strikes, mass-meetings may be called throughout the whole country, and good words may be spoken. But do the masses search their own hearts, do they repent before God?

*Verses 15-20*

In these verses the prophet described another disaster, namely a withering heat and great dryness. Food disappeared before their eyes, joy and gladness from the house of the Lord. They had seen seeds shriveled up under the clods, barns destroyed, granaries desolate, for the corn had withered. The cattle groaned for lack of pasture. There was no water for man or beast. The horror of the general all-encompassing ruin came over the people of Judah. This great need brought fears that the day of the Lord was near. But they were wrong.

Today, men have similar anxious premonitions when they note the current events. It cannot last long if things keep on going this way. But they are wrong. The day of the Lord isn't there yet. And the people who will experience the judgments of which Revelation 6 speaks will fear too that the "great day of God's wrath has come" (Rev. 6:17); they will say, "Who is able to stand?" But they are wrong too, for these judgments are but the beginning of woes.

Paul had to tell the Thessalonians that they were wrong. In the midst of persecutions, they were so disturbed, either through a supposed letter or a wrong spirit, that they began to think that the day of the Lord was present. But that day will not come before the apostasy will be there and the man of sin, the antichrist, will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

We like to point especially to verse 19 of Joel 1. "To Thee, Jehovah, do I cry." Joel took the place of the people's mediator and advocate before God. We do not read that even one person responded after the prophet had told the people, "Cry unto Jehovah." But the prophet himself did! He was a righteous man. And for God's grace it makes little difference whether there is one or many righteous ones who call upon Him in repentance. We read in Scripture of many men of God who took the place of mediator and advocate of the people. In the future God Himself will be gracious to the remnant of Israel on the basis of the work of Christ, the Righteous One.

*To be cont'd.*

## **Outline for Bible Study (51)**

### **104. From the Maccabees to John the Baptist — Events between the Old and New Testament (2)**

In 302 BC Palestine, lying between Egypt and Syria ("the King of the South" and "the King of the North" — see Dan. 11), was taken by Antiochus III (the Great) from Egypt and annexed to Syria. Antiochus III remained tolerant toward the Jews, but under Antiochus IV ("Epiphanes," meaning "the Enlightened One," but whom the people called "Epimanes," meaning *senseless*, because of his evil ways) who reigned from 176-164 BC, they endured a time of great tribulation, such as they had never encountered before. This "senseless one" plundered the Temple and determined to eradicate the worship of Jehovah. He raged against the Jewish institutions and, through unheard-of cruelties, he tried to bring the Jews to apostasy from the laws of God and the traditions of the fathers. Many Jews indeed did stop worshiping Jehovah, while others remained faithful, such as the ninety year-old scribe Eleazer and a mother with seven sons who were martyred. Antiochus IV conquered Jerusalem, broke down the walls, killed 80,000 Jews, and sold many as slaves. He profaned the temple by erecting an altar to Jupiter (Zeus) on the altar of burnt-offering. So was fulfilled what Daniel had prophesied (Dan. 8:9-12; 11:21-31).

Without doubt, Antiochus IV is a type of the King of the North during the time of the great tribulation. His was a time of God's judgment over the Jews because of their deep-rooted apostasy and heathen idolatry. Yet, there were also godly and faithful followers of Jehovah. Mattathias and his five heroic sons, who were called "Maccabees" (lit., "war clubs") for their valour, were used of God to bring salvation to His people (167-165 BC). One of them, Judas, distinguished himself. They drove the Syrian from the temple and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:32b). The temple service was restored and the feast of the dedication of the temple instituted. Antiochus Epiphanes had a horrible end, God caused him to die from gangrene spreading throughout his body.

Under the successors of Judas Maccabeus, discord among the Maccabees themselves caused Palestine to fall under the rule of the fourth, the Roman Empire (in Daniel represented by the "feet and toes, part of potter's clay and part of iron" — Dan. 2:33, 40-43, and "the fourth beast, dreadful and terrible and exceeding strong" — Dan. 7:7). This happened in 63 BC, when the fighting parties in Damascus and Jerusalem asked for the help of the Roman general, Pompey. Rome appointed governors over Judah but they allowed them to retain the sovereignty with the title of king, which the Maccabees had assumed since 106 BC.

One of those vassal-kings from the Maccabees gave his title and kingdom to a crafty Edomite (Idumean) named Antipater. A son of Antipater was Herod the Great, well-known from the Gospels, who ascended the throne in 37 BC to reign over Judea under Roman supremacy. He was a capable, but splendour-loving and cruel sovereign, a blood-thirsty tyrant. He killed all the remaining Maccabees, his own wife, and his two sons. During his reign, the Lord Jesus was born, the promised

Messiah, of the house of David, the Saviour of the world, the eternal Son of God. When Herod heard of his birth, he murdered all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and its surroundings (Mt. 2:13-16).

This Herod caused the temple to be rebuilt and extended. This was the temple during the days of the Lord Jesus. It was a tremendous edifice, with three different courts. First, the court of the Gentiles, then the court of the people, which was divided into a court for women and a court for men, lastly there was the court of the priests. The whole had a circumference of approximately 1350 yards. They worked on this building from 20 BC until 64 AD (long after Herod's death). The tremendous job was barely finished, when the Romans destroyed it in 70 AD. His building the temple brought Herod no mercy from God, he died a gruesome death at the age of 70, four years after Christ's birth. After his death the kingdom was divided among his sons:

1. Herod Antipas (the one who killed John the Baptist) became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea,
2. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria, and
3. Philip received Iturea (compare Lk. 3:1; Mt. 2:22).

With this brief explanation, we have come to the time recorded in the Gospels. During the intervening 400-year period the Holy Spirit remained silent in so far that God gave no further inspired Scripture. The scriptures compiled during the reign of the Maccabees, called apocryphal books, (meaning hidden scriptures), cannot be considered as part of God's Word. They are accepted neither by Israel, nor by the Church as God's Word, nor are they generally used during public religious services, no matter how important they may be in some respects.

We conclude the review of the interim period with a look at the various groups that existed in Israel during the Lord's walk on earth. These were the Scribes, and the religious parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Scribes, later called Rabbis (*teachers*) devoted their time to studying and explaining the Holy Scriptures to the people. Their explanations of God's Word were mostly void of the Spirit, yet binding for all, besides these they added various rituals. Through their own wisdom, God's Word was made of no effect. Hypocrisy was often the result of such interpretation.

The Pharisees (*separated ones, saints*) maintained that the Bible was God's Word and therefore eternal truth: they were considered the orthodox or conservative religious party of their days. But their interpretation was arbitrary and their faith, which did not come from humble, repentant hearts, was a dead faith full of pride and presumption. They proved to be the most bitter enemies of the Lord Jesus, His grace, and the truth of His eternal salvation.

The Sadducees (named after the priest Zadok) were the religious rationalists. They denied the resurrection, the last judgment, and the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). In their superficiality, mockery, and sensuality, they were antagonists of the Lord. They followed the principle: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

Just as their Lord, the disciples had to endure much enmity and mockery from these various parties, in whose eyes they were despised fools, but in the eyes of the Lord of glory, who went in and out with them, they were "the excellent, in [whom] is all My delight" (Ps. 16:3).

*To be cont'd*

### **Would God say this of us today?**

"Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words,"  
and ye say,  
"Wherein have we wearied Him?"  
In that ye say,  
"Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah,  
and He delighteth in them";  
or,  
"Where is the God of judgment?"

*Malachi 2:17*

### **Remember Jesus Christ Raised From Among The Dead (3)**

#### **Some thoughts on 2 Timothy 2**

—A. E. Bouter

We have seen that Paul, who regarded Timothy to be an overcomer, spoke of him as "my child." Timothy needed to be strengthened "in the grace which is in Christ Jesus," so that he would be able to entrust the truth to faithful and competent men. The important balance of grace and truth was stressed (Jn. 1:17; Prov. 3:3). Now Paul continues to address Timothy as a good soldier.

A good soldier of Jesus Christ

### *Distinctive Roles for Men and Women*

Paul, having the public testimony in view, refers here to men. This does not mean that sisters are excluded: their testimony is seen in their walk. When it comes to spiritual warfare, Scripture does not exclude sisters from being involved as good soldiers; both Prisca and Aquila were Paul's fellow-workers (Rom. 16:3f).

In 2 Timothy, however, the emphasis is on public ministry, the communication of the truth in view of the public testimony, and this is the responsibility of brothers,<sup>1</sup> provided they are able (competent) and faithful. In days of ruin, mere competency is not sufficient; faithfulness is essential too. This we saw already when we looked at Timothy's being a faithful child. Are we loyal to our Lord?

### *The Public Testimony in the Old Testament*

Before speaking further about the features of a good soldier, let us first consider something about the task of the soldier. In the Old Testament we find many illustrations that give practical help in realizing the truths revealed to us in the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:1-11). After the deliverance of God's earthly people from Egypt, we find them in the wilderness as a public testimony for God. God had delivered them so that He might dwell among them (Ex. 15:2b; 40:35). He wanted to have them for Himself, that they might serve Him. Before they entered into the promised land, where God would dwell with them and they with God, the Lord had His people as a testimony for Himself in the wilderness. We read about the ten commandments as being "two tables of testimony" (Ex. 31:18), about the ark of the testimony (Ex. 40:3,5,21) and also about the tabernacle of the testimony (Ex. 38:21). The book of Numbers develops this thought — God having His people as a testimony— in more detail. The centre of this testimony was the ark, which typifies Christ as we know Him now (Col. 1:19, 2:9; Heb. 2:9). Among the people of God the soldiers defended the ark and the tabernacle. The qualifications of these soldiers are found in Numbers 1:3-4.

### *The Public Testimony in the New Testament*

In the New Testament, the public testimony is linked with the local assembly. This is explained in the Epistles to the Corinthians and in a sense also in 1 Timothy. Then there are additional instructions in 2 Timothy for the days of ruin. In 1 Corinthians 1:6 it is the *testimony of Christ*, God's anointed Man: He is its Content, its Object, its All. In 1 Corinthians 2:1 it is *the testimony of God*, because He is its Author or Originator and it is for His glory, rather than man's. In 1 Timothy 3:15 the thought of testimony is found in the presentation of the (local and universal) Church of the living God as the pillar of the truth as revealed in Christ. Do we realize that what is at stake is the *testimony of our Lord*? (2 Tim. 1:8). It is all the same testimony, but each expression presents a different aspect of it. Here the added thought is that the Lord is the One who supports His own testimony; He has all authority and power to do this and to help his loyal soldiers.

### *Loyal sharing in suffering*

Wholehearted commitment is essential if we are to maintain this public testimony. Our blessed Lord suffered reproach among the Christians in Paul's day (cf. Phil. 2:21, 3:18f; 2 Tim. 1:15f). Today too, He is rejected, not only in the political and cultural world, but also in the religious world. We are, therefore, to suffer with the Gospel (1:8) in complete identification with the interests of the Lord and His good tidings. The Gospel is at war (see Phil. 1:27-30; 1 Tim. 1:18), so we should be prepared to suffer with it.

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, in 1 Cor. 15:1-8 Paul only mentions the public testimony of brothers regarding the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Yet, we know that Mary of Magdalene was the first to meet the risen Lord and that she told the disciples about the new position the Lord had given to believers. Also, in the aspect of moral succession, sisters play an indispensable role. This we see in Timothy's mother and grandmother.



Paul, entirely identifying himself with his Lord's interests, shared also in His reproach, giving thereby an example to others (2 Cor. 11:23-27). In 2 Timothy 1:12 we read that he was not ashamed although he had to suffer. He was indeed a good soldier of Christ Jesus! Such faithfulness is a prerequisite for rendering service and testimony to our Lord who is now absent from this scene (Mt. 25:21,23; Lk. 12:42; 1 Cor. 4:2; Rev. 2:13).

Would Timothy be ashamed of the Lord's testimony or of Paul? If he wouldn't, he had to be prepared to suffer evil (1:8; 2:3), finding comfort in the knowledge that he shared such sufferings with other loyal soldiers (3:12; 4:5), and even with a prisoner as Paul (1:16; 2:9). Indeed, how encouraging it is to see that we share with others the path that honours the Lord!

All this reminds us of the Lord Himself, when He was on earth, He certainly was the most perfect Soldier God ever had. We know Him now as the great Captain of our salvation and as the "Leader and Completer of faith" (Hebr. 2:10; 12:2). We are placed under His command. At the same time, He is our perfect Model and Guide, leading us every step of the way on the battlefield. He desires us to be soldiers in harmony with this dispensation's spirit of grace.

### *The need for balance.*

Timothy was likely more gifted as a teacher (2:2,7,14,15,23; 3:10,16; 4:2; 1 Tim. 1:3; 4:6-16; 6:20), yet he was encouraged to do the work of an evangelist (4:5). I would suggest that this applies to all believers who want to go on in faithfulness to the Lord, whatever their gift may be. There is an urgent need to *live* the Gospel (2:8), to be in harmony with the interests our Lord has in the spread of the Gospel.

Paul himself was a minister of the Gospel and of the Church (Assembly — Col. 1:23,25). In a day of ruin we may easily lose sight of the importance of a balanced position: we might overemphasize the truth of the Assembly (locally or universally) at the expense of the promotion of the Gospel. On the other hand, we could be so burdened for the salvation of souls that we forget about maintaining the truth in love. It is a human tendency to fall from one extreme into another. We need therefore to be careful to maintain a proper balance in this, as in all things. How we need wisdom, discernment, and love!

### *No Entanglement with the Affairs of Life*

That there is a need for the instruction in verse four becomes evident when we read Philippians 3:18f. This passage deals with professing, and perhaps even with born-again Christians who, in their thinking, were completely absorbed by earthly things and lived only for these. This is a danger for us all (1 Jn. 5:21). Earthly things may be good in themselves (1 Tim. 4:1-5), but the attitude or mentality of those about whom Paul wrote was wrong. They failed to use these things in dependence upon, and in fellowship with the Lord.

In our verse, however, the point is that the soldier gives up even the legitimate use of certain earthly blessings which God has given. Why? In order to be entirely free to please the Master! We could give many examples, but we rather see the Spirit of God exercise, convict, and direct each one of us in this matter.

Timothy, of course, did not need an exhortation to abstain from *sinful* things, or to be separated from the world. But as a man of God, he had to abstain from the legitimate use of *good* things, and this also with the right motives. What a challenge lies here for us who desire to be "a man of God" in a day of ruin! Our motives, I repeat, are to be examined in the presence of the Lord (Ps. 139:23f), because there is no room for fleshly motives, such as asceticism, mysticism, or vain glory.

The warning not to entangle oneself with the affairs of life would perhaps also apply to non-involvement in (so-called) Christian politics, or politically oriented movements and organizations. The soldier of 2 Timothy 2 has put on the armour of light (Rom. 13:12) and is at the same time an ambassador of heaven (Phil. 3:20). We find this clearly illustrated in Abraham in contrast to Lot.

### *To please Him*

The ultimate goal, as well as the only right motive, is to please the Lord (2:4) — not myself, or the brethren, or men. Yet, we should care for their needs with genuine interest. The natural man is not able to do this (Rom. 8:3), but as Christians we have a wonderful Model, One who always did what was pleasing to God (Jn. 8:29).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See for this important subject 1:18; 2:15,21; 4:8 and also Rom. 12:1f; 2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10 and other passages.

## *A good soldier of Jesus Christ*

According to the latest editions of the Greek New Testament, we should read in verse three "of Christ Jesus." This would agree with the context of this epistle, which not only views our position as before God in the Anointed One (Christ), but also presents His life on earth as our perfect Model (Jesus). Noblesse oblige: a high position asks for a blameless walk. Our practice as soldiers flows from our wonderful position. Especially at the end of the dispensation, in a day of utter ruin, we have to appreciate and to realise the greatness of our position. This in turn will help us to maintain God's thoughts and to be good soldiers, real overcomers. We are a people under attack (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:12) and will lose out when we fail to be good soldiers.

I would like to link the word "good" (soldier) with the following passages: "war... the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18); "strive earnestly [in] the good conflict (combat) of faith;... the good confession" (1 Tim. 6:12); "contend lawfully" (2:5) and "I have combated the good combat" ("fought the good fight" KJV — 2 Tim. 4:7). We understand from these passages that not only our moral condition has to be suitable before God, but the cause for which, and the way in which we fight are important as well.

### *Parallels with the Epistle to the Philippians.*

At this point I would like to digress for a moment to look at the parallel characters of the Second Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to the Philippians. Almost all of the seven expressions we are studying in the context of 2 Timothy 2 are present in Philippians, and for those not found literally there, we have at least a clear suggestion:

1. "As a child a father, he (Timothy) has served with me in the work of the glad tidings" (Phil. 2:22; 2 Tim. 2:1).
2. "I (Paul) am set for the defence of the glad tidings," and: "Epaphroditus... my fellow-soldier" (1:17; 2:25; 2 Tim. 2:3). They were engaged in the same spiritual battle (Phil. 1:30) with Paul (Col. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:7). These and other passages (Eph. 6:10-20) show that this battle takes place first of all in prayer.
3. As athletes, the Philippians were involved in the conflict of the glad tidings (1:27) together with Paul and others (4:3), and in a race (3:13-17).
4. As a genuine farmer or husbandman, together with Timothy (2 Tim. 2:6) and Epaphroditus, Paul had taken care of the Philippians, as God would do on his side (Phil. 1:6; 2:13) as the One who is in control of the mystery of spiritual growth (1 Cor. 3:7; Isa. 28:23-29; Mk. 4:26-29).
5. Epaphroditus had worked as a fellow-worker with Paul and Timothy (Phil. 2:25; Rom. 16:21); this word is related to the word workman in 2 Timothy 2:15.
6. As a vessel filled with joy, Paul was truly a vessel fit for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21). Since he was ready to be poured out as a libation (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6), he was an encouragement for Timothy to be a prepared vessel.
7. As a slave or bondman, Paul was linked with Timothy (Phil. 1:1; 2:22) who served with him as a bondman of the Lord (2 Tim. 2:24).

*To be cont'd*

### **A good practice...**

They that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another.

### **with a good result**

And ye shall... discern between the  
righteous and the wicked, between him  
that serveth God and him that serveth  
Him not.

*Malachi 3:16,18*