

Habakkuk (2)

—H. L. Rossier

Judgment Over the Oppressor
The Prophet on His Watchtower

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer as to my reproof" (v. 1).

The Prophet took the place of an observer on "his watchtower," which means that he took up a position at that place where the enemy would attack his people. Rather than keep far from the matter, he tried to imagine the reality of the coming judgment. He did not assume this position, however, to resist the enemy, for he knew that the word of the Lord would certainly be fulfilled. His observation had a twofold purpose: to see what the Lord would say to him at the threat of the enemy's attack, and what he himself would answer.

Regarding this coming event Habakkuk expected a new revelation from God's thoughts. He had not yet learned all he had to know. Although he was aware that God could not bear Israel's unrighteousness, and that He would judge it by means of the Chaldeans (ch. 1:6); he also knew that God could not tolerate the unrighteousness of the Chaldeans. However, he did not know yet what God intended to do.

Above all, how would the Lord be able to deliver the righteous ones who had trusted in Him if He had to judge both the Israelites and the Chaldeans? Habakkuk expected to have to answer, as Moses did in earlier days when the Lord strove with him about Israel after it had made the golden calf (Ex. 32:7-14; 33:12-16). But his intention to present a reply would receive a most definite answer that was beyond dispute. There would be no more room for making even a single remark, as he had intended to do. The second wish of his heart could, therefore, not *be* realized because he would not meet a God who was going to dispute with him.

From then on he would say: "I heard," and thank God for his salvation (ch. 3).

A Not-Sealed Vision

"And Jehovah answered me and said, Write the vision, and engrave it upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it" (v. 2).

God desired that the vision which the prophet would receive would be *written, engraved*, to make it durable, so that it could be kept and read (see also Isa. 30:8), for it concerned both imminent and *future* matters of immense significance. Indeed, here Habakkuk did not just receive instructions about the ways of God with His people, as in chapter 1. While learning about the final judgment over the nations and the calamities that would overcome them, he discovered that all things had as their goal *God's honour, the glory of Christ's eternal rule*. And, finally, he learned what the attitude of the righteous had to be while awaiting that rule, and what the great work of redemption is toward them. This vision was not only to be read and well understood, but also to be quickly shared with others, for the time was short.

We believe the significance of the words is: "that he may run that readeth it." Impressed by the importance of this answer from the Lord, he was forced to go and spread it in the world. Here it was not, as in Daniel, a book that is sealed until the last days (Dan. 12:4), but a clear, understandable announcement of God's thoughts, meant to be quickly spread everywhere. This vision, that bore an evangelical character, was certainly not to be sealed. Daniel's vision, once sealed, is no longer sealed to the believer, that of Habakkuk, however, has never been sealed.

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but it hasteth to the end, and shall not lie" (v. 3).

Doubtless, this vision announced the approaching demise of the Chaldean power which was about to appear on the scene. The time of its activity had been predetermined, but the vision reaches much further: *it speaks of the end*, of the glory of Christ's kingdom. Although these latter things are still future, yet they are perfectly established, for a vision given by God

Himself cannot fail. Consequently, He took care to have it engraved on tablets just as He had earlier engraved the law on tables of stone; the law, whose contents was never sealed.

The Ultimate Fulfillment

"Though it tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come, it will not delay" (v. 3).

God's Spirit draws to our attention the fact that the vision speaking about the end can still tarry.

What was announced by it about the Chaldeans has been fulfilled 2.5 millennia ago. But *the end* of which the vision spoke still tarries. The believer still waits for that glorious time today, building on God's promises. It will *certainly come*. The sign that will announce it is not deceiving. This sign is, as we know, *the coming of the Lord Jesus* in judgment. In Hebrews 10:37 the apostle Paul applied Habakkuk 2:3 to the appearance of Christ in the last days when he wrote: "For yet a very little while He that comes will come, and will not delay," while in Habakkuk it refers to the Chaldeans at a set time.

Once more we remark how the Holy Spirit Himself explains the Word of God; we already saw this in chapter 1, and we will also see it as we continue our study. We, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11), — who by the cross of Christ have been introduced — receive a much further-reaching explanation of the prophecy than Habakkuk did. We live in the time of the end but have not yet reached the prophetic times. For us the end of the age (dispensation) will begin at *the coming* (parousia) *of the Son of God*. Then the prophetic times will start to run their course and will end with *the appearing* (epiphania) *of the Son of man*, which will introduce Christ's glorious reign on earth (v. 14). Christ is always the goal, the end, the last word of prophecy. This verse, therefore, is also of great importance because it shows us that when prophecy has an historic or partial fulfillment, this fulfillment is never *the last we have heard of it*. Only in the last days will the historical event find its full and definite significance. Its explanation can only be truly known when we have our eye focused on the person of Christ and the glory that follows upon His suffering (1 Pet 1:11).

And so, a comparison of Hebrews 10:37 with Habakkuk 2:3 totally destroys teaching that rests on the purely historical explanation of the prophecies. It also shows that the Scriptures form one entire whole. We must not consider any passage separate from others. Each part belongs to the whole and God's Spirit explains it according to whether the subject is imminent events or events of the last days. We already saw an example of this in Habakkuk 1:5, which the apostle explained in Acts 13. Only God's Spirit can explain to us what He has revealed. Man's mind, his spirit, could never presuppose the total bearing of the revelation with which we are dealing, if God's Spirit did not assume the role of teacher. The vision is still tarrying, and soon we will see the reason for this. But its fulfillment will certainly come, and our attitude has to be one of waiting. The Lord is coming. Hebrews 10:37 does not deal with His *coming* (parousia) *for the Church* to take up all saints, but with His *appearing* (epiphania) *as King*, which, just as His coming, is the object of our expectation. For then, Christ's reign on earth, the subject of nearly every Old Testament prophecy, will be introduced, and the faithful ones will receive their crowns.

The Heart of the Book of Habakkuk

"Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him" (v. 4)

The promise mentioned in verse 3 is a truth that is completely foreign to all proud men. They lack uprightness. No doubt this is an allusion to the Chaldean, but it is also applicable to every soul who is in the same condition as the Chaldean. Pride makes man unfit for understanding God's thoughts; which are only made known to those who believe. Only faith "is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." And so God adds: "But the just shall live by his faith" (v. 4).

This important verse is the heart of the entire book of Habakkuk. It is directed at those who are in the same circumstances as the prophet, for the prophecy can only be understood by *those who are righteous*; the world is totally ignorant of it.

Only when one sees things "by his faith" are they clear, and only righteous ones are able to live this way. The deliverance will certainly come; the glorious reign of Christ will rise like the sun when the obstructions against God have been cast down, obstructions that Satan puts in its way by the glorification of man's pride.

Faith, which on its watchtower observes things, sees that obstruction destroyed and awaits the Lord of glory. Until that moment the righteous one is neither downcast nor without help. His faith sustains him, and that faith feeds his life. This is the bearing of Habakkuk 2:4b.

But in the New Testament God's Spirit goes much further. Paul's doctrine was entirely permeated by this phrase. Three times he quoted it, and, similar to what we have observed before, each time he gave a different explanation for it. In Romans 1:17 the issue is *righteousness*, in Galatians 3:11 it is *faith*, in Hebrews 10:38 it is *life*. These three words have to do with the teaching contained in each of the epistles referred to. Let us, therefore, consider the particulars of these passages.

1. Romans 1:16-17. "For I am not ashamed of the glad tidings; for it is God's power to salvation, to every one that believes, both to Jew first and to Greek: for righteousness of God is revealed therein, on the principle of faith, to faith: according as it is written, But the just shall live by faith."

In verse 16 the apostle began to establish the character of the gospel: God Himself, who acts with power when man is totally lost. Therefore, where the gospel is brought, God no longer asks anything from man; He does not demand works as a way of straightening things out between him and God. *God acts; His power* is working for the benefit of man. Not to help him, but to save him, for this power is for *salvation*. *Faith* is the means whereby one secures salvation, which is for both Jew and Greek, for oneself. The law, given to Israel, is therefore set aside as a means of salvation, and faith has taken its place.

The law did not reach beyond Jewish boundaries, faith reaches far beyond them, for the gospel is the power of God for salvation to *everyone* that believes. The gospel is that power for salvation because God's righteousness (the grand subject of the Epistle to the Romans) is revealed therein. The righteousness of *God*, which stands in the greatest possible contrast to the righteousness of man, is *revealed* therein. It does not demand, as the righteousness of man does. There is no other basis for receiving this righteousness than *faith*. At the very moment faith has received it, it has become "the property of faith." The believer is righteous from that moment on. He possesses a divine righteousness that is not on the basis of human works, for he is only righteous by faith. And if by faith, it is on the basis of pure grace, for only through grace does man come to faith and receive the revelation of righteousness.

This portion from Romans 1 does not yet mention *the work of Christ* as the only means whereby righteousness can become our portion. This cardinal truth is expounded in the remainder of the epistle. Here, only the great fact is established that now an entirely new and absolute righteousness has been revealed and become the possession of faith — the righteousness of God Himself. Therefore Paul quotes Habakkuk: "The just shall live by [or on the basis of] faith." That is, the believer must prove by a life of faith that he possesses this righteousness.

2. Galatians 3:11. "But that by law no one is justified with God is evident, because The just shall live on the principle of faith; but the law is not on the principle of faith; but, He that shall have done these things shall live by them."

The subject of *the law* — which in Romans 1 was only touched upon as something quite incidental, to receive full light in Chapter 7 — is in the Epistle to the Galatians dealt with in great detail. It is shown in Galatians 3:10 that all who stand on the basis of the law are under the curse, as declared in Deuteronomy 27:26. For Israel, the nations under the law, there was only an *Ebal* (curse) and it was deprived of *Gerizim* (blessing). After this, the apostle quoted Habakkuk. He wrote: "that by law no one is justified with God is evident, because the just shall live on the principle of *faith*." Here, then, faith is put in the forefront, and Paul did not stop there, although he did not lose sight of its link with righteousness or with life. He put faith in juxtaposition with *the law*, which could neither give the one nor the other. Next, he proved that the law is not on the basis of faith because the law pointed to *works* as the means of receiving life or righteousness (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5). Finally, he showed how the setting free from the law had been brought about: "Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, (for it is written, Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree)" (Gal. 3:13).

3. Hebrews 10:36-39. "For ye have need of endurance in order that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay. But the just shall live by faith; and, if he draw back, my soul does not take pleasure in him. But we are not drawers back to perdition, but of faith to saving the soul."

Here Paul quoted the entire verse from Habakkuk. First the words: "For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay," which Habakkuk ascribed to the Chaldean for a set time. The apostle applied them to *the last days*, that is to say, to Christ's appearing in glory, not to an event, but to a *person*, to *Him* who will come and not delay.

After this we read the quote: "But the just (or "My just," meaning, God's just one) shall live by faith." This means that the righteous person shall continue living by faith until the coming of Christ. *Living* by faith is the share of the righteous ones only. It is the great subject of Hebrews 11 in which we see *the life of faith in all* its various characteristics. By faith Abel approached God through faith with an animal sacrifice and was thereby declared righteous; Enoch, who walked with God,

was taken away; Noah showed patience, and, while waiting those many years during which the ark was being prepared, preached the righteousness of faith, and finally we see the patriarchs who, living as strangers and pilgrims, waited for a better country. Everywhere the apostle showed that the life of a righteous man is a life by faith that ends in glory.

Difference in Application

In Hebrews 10 the quote from Habakkuk is filled out in a very remarkable way. The prophet had said: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him: but the just shall live by his faith." Paul rearranged the sentence: "But the just shall live by faith; and, if he draw back, my soul does not take pleasure in him." This second part of the sentence, quoted from the Septuagint, agrees with the words: "His soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him." Paul sets over against each other: the person who "draw[s] back" and the person who "live[s] by faith." The first one will be lost, perishes; the other saves his life. Habakkuk first presented him who was proudly puffed, and applied this character more to the Chaldean enemy than to any other. The apostle, who used the translation by the Seventy, applied it to the Hebrews who had accepted Christianity, but were in danger of returning to Judaism. He rearranged both sentences to avoid giving ground to the assumption that he had the proud nations in view, as like Habakkuk did. Thereby he wanted to warn the Israelites who had come to know and confess Christianity, but who *did not walk right as* a result of their Jewish pride which promoted holiness-by-works.

Here we have one of the many examples of the use God's Spirit made of an *imperfect*, although not incorrect translation. The Hebrew text of Habakkuk 2:4 contains a certain vagueness in the words "his soul," although they are clearly applied to the Chaldean. The soul of one who withdraws to return to the law is never correct. It is always pride which separates him from Christ and grace. Consequently, God has no pleasure in him. He has pleasure in the just one who, by faith, lives humbly before Him.

We cannot stress sufficiently how greatly valuable all these quotes become to us through the different applications the Holy Spirit gives to them. "The just shall live by his faith" is therefore the heart of the Book of Habakkuk. The faith of the prophet had already shown itself in chapter 1:12, when it dealt with his relationships to God. But that was not all; he had to *live out of it to the end*. The Lord wanted this truth to be set forth in connection with the Chaldean, Israel's enemy.

Pride of the Chaldean

"And moreover, the wine is treacherous: he is a proud man, and keepeth not at rest, he enlargeth his desire as Sheol, and he is like death and cannot be satisfied; and he assembleth unto him all nations, and gathereth unto him all peoples" (v. 5).

This man, the Chaldean, was drunk with self-importance and ambitious desires. He could not *be* content with achieved successes and he was never satisfied (Prov. 30:16; Isa. 5:14). He made himself the centre of everything, of the people and the nations. Wasn't (and isn't) this from beginning to end, in the past and in the present, the thought, the longing, and the politics of those who lead the nations? Their ambitious egoism prides itself that they consider themselves far above other people, and their wish is that their country may dominate other nations. Fundamentally it is the pride that is prepared to sacrifice everything to own personal greatness. Because of the unfaithfulness of His people God had given the reign to Babel. But He could not allow man to exercise that power apart from Him to satisfy his own ambitious heart that, rather than subject itself to God, was occupied with self.

God would judge him, but we will first see how the curse of all whom he wanted to oppress fell upon him. They would see through his motives, judge his striving, curse his ungodliness and pride. This fifth verse is the introduction to the *song* that now follows.

To be cont'd

The Battle of Conquerors (8)

—G. H. Elbers

"Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with *the* preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all *these*, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph. 6:14-18).

God's Battle-Technique

This title may seem a little irreverent, but if you read on a little, you will understand what I mean. In the previous chapter we saw that the armour that God has designed is certainly a little different from what we humans would expect. That is because God's strategy is also very different. When we humans would have a go at an enemy, we would naturally begin with a sword! But God does it differently and... who would know best? We or God? Who knows the enemy best? We or God?

Well then, the armour of God looks like this:

1. The loins girt about with truth
2. The chest covered with the breastplate of righteousness
3. The feet shod with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace

Next comes the acceptance or taking hold of:

4. The shield of faith
5. The helmet of salvation
6. The sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God)

The total is accompanied and undergirded by:

7. Continual prayer.

Well, these are the 'components' wherewith we can and must engage in battle. Let us especially understand and believe that all this is more than enough to be able to stand in the difficult and heavy battle. It is unthinkable that the Lord would give us something that would be either useless or inadequate! Therefore, if we miss the effect of God's might and power, the cause for it must doubtlessly be found with us. And keeping this in mind, we must look once more at the order of these attributes.

The Loins Girt with Truth.

Truth is the first thing mentioned. Is it really a weapon? What could truth possibly accomplish in the spiritual battle? Well, let us take another look at who our opponent is. In John 8:44 he is called 'the father of lies.' From this we can conclude that the spiritual battle is first of all a confrontation between the lie and the truth. For example, do you see how terribly awful lies are? The origin and inventor of the lie is... Satan himself. But, then, who and what is really the truth?

a. The Lord Jesus is the Truth!

If we want to know what true truth is, we must look at Him of whom John writes in John 1:14: "We have contemplated His glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of *grace* and *truth*." And verse 17 says clearly that *grace* and *truth* came with Jesus Christ. In John 14:6 the Lord Jesus says of Himself: "I am the *way*, and the *truth*, and the *life*. No one comes to the Father unless by Me." If we allow these statements to sink in, we can understand that we cannot and never engage in the spiritual battle without the Lord Jesus! Would we be able to resist the father of lies without this Truth? In fact, John 8:36 teaches us that He, who is the Truth, the Son of God, sets us truly free!

b. God's Word is Truth!

During the temptation in the wilderness of which we read in Matthew 4:1-11 and other Scriptures, Satan tried, in a fashion, to quote the Word of God. Naturally, the Lord Jesus immediately saw through this and corrected the devil with the same Word, but in a proper way. He used the Word as "the last word" that contains all truths within itself and does not permit contradiction. When the Lord Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father (Jn. 17), He asked: "Sanctify them by the *truth*: Thy Word is *truth*."

Even centuries before this, David uttered a beautiful prayer of praise in which he said: "Thou art that God, and Thy words are true" (2 Sam. 7:28). This servant of God, the man after God's heart, had understood this very well and... had experienced it.

Then we read in the first epistle Paul writes to Timothy that there were false teachers who would present fables, preaching all kinds of traditions (for instance 1 Tim. 1:3-7 and 4:1-4). He warned his beloved brother for this and especially encouraged him to plow straight lines when preaching the Word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15), not twisting or adapting any part of it!

Do you see how important truth is? It is the truth that sets free ("My words," the Lord Jesus said in John 8:32). It is truth that exposes the lie of false doctrine and hollow words so that Satan with his lies cannot get the advantage of us. Is it conceivable that we could fight the spiritual battle without God's Word?

c. The Holy Spirit is Truth!

Again such an important word! When we are called to gird our loins with the truth, we realize that we cannot do so without the Lord Jesus or the Word of God, but neither can we do so without the Holy Spirit. We need Him, too, in the battle against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies.

How fortunate we are that we have received the Holy Spirit as the Lord Jesus promised us in John 7:38-39. What a happy people we are that by God's grace we may know that this Spirit of Truth has been given to us and even indwells us (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:19). It is precisely this Spirit of Truth who will teach us and remind us of what the Lord Jesus has said (Jn. 14:25-26). According to John 16:13 the Holy Spirit will show the way into all truth. It is the same Spirit who has revealed God's thoughts and counsels to us, the counsels of Him who cannot lie (1 Cor. 2:10; Heb. 6:18).

From all this we learn that the truth is an extremely important part of God's armour, absolutely necessary for us to be able to stand.

d. The Truth is opposed to the Lie!

Perhaps you will say that this is rather obvious. But, just as we must realize that we cannot go into this battle without the Lord Jesus, that we cannot function without the Word of God, that we would have no place to stand without the Holy Spirit, *so we must also realize that lying can be the immediate cause of a great defeat!* It is amazing how even many Christians consider a "little white lie" quite normal. You too? I hope not, for God does not know large and small lies! Whether you drown in a well with two or with twenty meters of water, you still drown. "Do not lie to one another," Paul wrote in Colossians 3:9. For lying is sin, isn't it?

The Girdle on which it all hangs!

We believers therefore must gird our loins with truth. The girdle is the belt that holds everything together. Can you imagine a soldier who has to hold up his sagging pants with one hand during the battle? You may be laughing, but 'to gird the loins' is to bind the clothing together and to keep the remainder of the armour together. It is the belt of truth that has to be properly adjusted and must be complete. One who thinks that in the battle he can permit himself to disregard or even to despise one of the above mentioned truths will experience that the rest of the armour does not function well either. No, if we truly want to stand fast, then the Lord Jesus, God's Word, and God's Spirit are indispensable, and we must hate the lie!

To be cont'd

Fellowship at the Lord's Table

—J. van Dijk

Introduction

The subject we want to consider has led to much discussion within the Christian community. Opinions on it vary greatly and as a result we see a multitude of denominations and factions within them. All this is in contrast to the desire of the Lord who in John 17 asked His Father "And I do not demand for these only, but also for those who believe on Me through their word *that they may be all one*, as thou, Father; art in Me, and I in Thee, *that they also may be one in Us*, that the world may *believe* that Thou hast sent Me." That all Christians are one in Christ is a fact that will be seen when the Lord takes us home. We thank the Lord that this fact is not affected by the present fragmentation. To this fact, the Lord referred a few lines later when He asked: "*That they may be perfected into one* and that the world may *know* that Thou hast sent Me, and that Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." How sad, however, that today our display to this world is one of division rather than of oneness. What should our attitude be in such an environment? Does the Bible indicate that there could be conditions that would prevent those who are one in Christ from displaying their oneness? We need to settle two questions. First, Who are those that are one? Secondly, Has God given a pattern for the display of this oneness?

Who Are Those That Are One?

The Lord Jesus in addressing the Father speaks of "the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world." He says about them: "They were Thine, and Thou gavest them Me, and they have *kept Thy Word*. Now they have known that all things that Thou hast given Me are of Thee; for *the words which Thou hast given Me I have given them, and they have received them*, and have known truly that I came out from Thee" (*Jn. 17:6-8*). We notice that one of their prime characteristics is their obedience to the Word of God. They believe that the Father has sent the Lord Jesus, which is another of their characteristics. In John 1:12-13 we read that "as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to be children of God, to those that believe on His name; who have been born, not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God."

Though we could mention many other Scriptures, it is clear from these that those who have received God's Word and believe in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus are born again. These have been given to the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus declares them to be one in Him. This is a first requisite.

Yet, in practice we find denominations that knowingly include others of whom these things are not true. Such denominations do not express the oneness of which the Lord spoke in His prayer. They may claim to be legitimate Christian "churches," but they display a "oneness" which is but a corruption of God's oneness. Their declared terms of membership is too wide.

Thankfully there are also many denominations that carefully monitor their membership. As a result one can be reasonably sure (pretenders may hide anywhere; they were even found in the early Church — Jude 4) that such companies do indeed consist only of persons of whom the Lord spoke in His prayer. Unfortunately, however, there is more than one fellowship of whom this can be said, each having its own requirement for membership. Because of this they fail to practically express the oneness of which the Lord spoke. One company may stress the mode of baptism, the other the place given to the Holy Spirit, the next one stresses gospel outreach, and another the mode of church government. As a result, their declared terms of membership is too narrow.

If we are to display the oneness the Lord prayed about, all who are members of the body of Christ — the only membership known in the Scriptures — must be received. That there, nevertheless, can be scriptural reasons for not receiving some members of the body of Christ we will look into later.

How do we Express This Oneness?

Not only the Lord speaks of the oneness of all believers, but Paul, too, speaks of it. He refers to this oneness as a spiritual fact with its consequences. "For, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other" (Rom. 12:4-5). "For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ. For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body.... For also the body is not one member but many.... But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, according as it has pleased him. But if all were one member, where the body? But now the members are many, and the body one.... But much rather, the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ...that there might be no division in the body, but that the members might have the same concern one for another. And if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are Christ's body, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:12-27). "Wherefore, having put off falsehood, speak truth everyone with his neighbour, because we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). "For we are members of His body; we are of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30).

In these verses Paul speaks of the individual Christians as members of one body who ought to have mutual care for each other. They must realize that they need each other and that God has given them to each other as members of the one body of Christ. These portions deal with their individual behaviour as a result of what they mutually possess.

Besides this, there is that which we must do collectively as a result of our membership in the body of Christ. We express our oneness also by partaking at the Lord's table. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of the Christ? Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

This act is of all acts most expressive of our oneness in Christ, for all (that is if all is well) partake of it. The breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup cannot be done by one alone but is done by the entire company when they meet together to remember their Lord. The communion or oneness the saints enjoy with their Lord and each other is expressed by the common cup and the one loaf. They speak in silent language of the things we have been taught by the Lord Himself and by His apostles: We all are one in Christ.

What Would Hinder a Proper Display?

But this can be done only where all those, but only those, who belong to the body of Christ have access. If some would be excluded, for instance because of their view on baptism or similar reasons, outwardly their action would appear to be the same, but the soul of it is missing. Some who ought to be present are kept away. However things may *appear*, the act in such a setting is not expressive of oneness, but rather of division.

Conversely, sometimes the same act of breaking bread is performed in a place where some partake who are known not to belong to the body of Christ. Here again things may outwardly appear to express oneness. Yet, rather than expressing oneness, the act in such a place expresses confusion and corruption.

For a proper expression of the oneness of the body of Christ it is essential that all who belong to that body have free access to the breaking of bread. Conversely, all who do not belong to that body ought not to have a place among those who do belong.

Should we not admit that the introduction of human ideas has divided the Christian company? Had we all followed the Word of God closely, we would have been of one mind, and divisions would not have come in. We must therefore conclude that if there is to be an answer for troublesome situations, it can only be found in close adherence to the Word of God and doing God's will. This ties in with the Lord's prayer, in which He said that one feature of those who belong to Him is that they have received and believed God's Word.

The alternative to doing God's will is of necessity that each one does what seems right in his own eyes. We know what period in Israel's history was marked by this attitude (Judg. 21:25). No good is to be expected if we follow this pattern! We need to search for, and know God's thoughts in the matter.

Has God a Pattern For The Display of This Oneness?

To understand God's thoughts we need to know how to read the Bible. We know that we are not under law. We therefore cannot expect a series of "do's" and "don'ts." A child in its parents' home ought not only to obey its parents' specific commands. It also should take note of their desires, though they may not have been spoken but only understood from their example. Similarly, the child of God has to take note of God's desires. Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain because he had taken note of God's action when his father and mother had sinned (Heb. 11:4). God had supplied skins from an animal to cover their nakedness. Thereby Abel had understood that another had to die if he were to stand before God. So he brought a bloody sacrifice, though God had never expressly told him to do so. This is a lesson for us; we need to read God's Word, for in it God shows His desires in the examples He gives.

When we want to know God's desires for His Church, we must carefully read the historical example God gave in the Book of the Acts, as well as the counsel Paul gives in the Epistles. The pattern found in these sections of Scripture is not a commandment given to us, but an expression of God's wish in these matters. And certainly our relationship with God is to be: Thy wish is my command. Would God's Spirit lead us in a different pattern than that in which He led the early Christians? Did He change? Did God change? Or are we more sensitive to the Spirit's leading than they?

If we want to do away with divisions, we need to do away with our own preferences and our own ideas and follow the patterns God has given us in His Word. There is no other way. That is the way of the obedience of faith, not the obedience of law.

Rather than spelling out here what we believe God's Word teaches us in this regard, we ask our readers to search it out for themselves. We have this confidence that if hearts truly desire to know God's mind regarding these things, they will indeed come to know what pleases Him (Jn. 7:17). These things are, first of all, a matter of the heart.

How Can we Display the Oneness?

Could there be a legitimate hindrance to displaying the oneness of the body of Christ at the Lord's table? What about the denominations, which result only from man's ideas interfering with God's pattern? Can we simply ignore the fact that someone belongs to a denomination, and so give credence to man's ideas? If we do so, we leave something unsettled that needs to be settled, we perpetuate something that is not of God (1 Cor 1:10-13). An ecumenical movement in which unscriptural denominations cooperate cannot result in a scriptural display of unity.

Let us suppose now that some have indeed judged the existence of denominational boundaries. They have spoken with each other and realize that they all see the same thing in this regard. They now desire to act on what they have learned, but they are well aware that by no means all true Christians have understood what they understand. Can they now break bread with *each* other or would that make them one more denomination?

Surely, acting on God's Word will never result in another denomination. But would they not be like those in Corinth who said: "We are of Christ"? If they act in the right spirit, that would not be the case. When those in Corinth said this, they did so to contrast themselves from others in the sense of: "We *alone* are of Christ and you are of Paul, or of Peter" rather than in the proper collective sense, "We *all* are of Christ, *including you* who claim to be of Paul or Peter." This is indeed a great danger. There have been those who, seeking to follow the pattern found in God's Word, fell right into this trap of Satan. They ended up by saying like some in Corinth, "We are of Christ," or "We have the Lord's table." God will blow on this, and scatter them just as He has done with so many denominations.

Are There Limits to the Display of This Oneness?

The question then remains: Should those who act on what they learned from Scripture receive all true Christians? They certainly ought to consider each one who would seek to break bread with them. But what criteria would they apply for either receiving or refusing them? Only those can be received who are free from wrong doctrines regarding the Person and work of the Lord Jesus and the Word of God, and who live a moral life. Besides this, they must not maintain personal or ecclesiastical relationships with persons who would be refused for the above reasons (1 Cor. 5; 2 Jn.). In 2 Timothy 2 Paul, after pointing to the personal responsibility to depart from iniquity, tells Timothy — and us — to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." This sets the limits of true Christian fellowship in days of decline.

What does this mean practically? It means there is some restriction beyond what we have seen above. Can we consider someone, coming from a denomination with proper discipline, but with an attitude of: "I can go where I want," as having a pure heart? We don't think so. Yet, another from the same "church," who has never thought of these things, is prepared to seek God's mind in these matters. This person displays thereby a pure heart toward God, though he or she is as yet ignorant of God's desire in the matter due to a lack of teaching of these things. It is therefore quite possible that we would receive one who normally attends a denominational "church" while we refuse another from the very same "church." It is a matter of the individual's purity of heart.

There are others who in the past followed the pattern that God has for His Church. Due to conflicts with their brethren, they have left that place and now continue in one of the denominations. Such cannot be considered to have a pure heart, for their personal problems have taken a greater place than God's wish. Then there is another who out of conviction no longer continues in this pattern. Yet, one day this person wants to break bread in the place he left. Can one who is convinced that a place is not according to God's Word break bread in that place with a pure heart? We judge it to be impossible.

Conclusion

We see then that there is a way in which we can walk in the God-given pattern. In that place all members of the body of Christ are received, yet those members who are defiled by reason of wrong morals, doctrines, or associations and those members who lack purity of heart are not received there. All this can be done in full agreement with the Word of God. Thereby the oneness which the Lord prayed to be displayed in this world will be shown to the largest possible extent. How sad, however, that not all who truly belong to the body of Christ see this and thus the most convincing testimony to this world is missing. Well may we acknowledge our failure to demonstrate to the world that God has sent the Lord Jesus.

The Temple Singers

—H. Bouter

1 Chronicles 23:5,30; 25:1-7

When king David grew old; he gave instructions to his son Solomon to build the temple and to divide the Levites and assign their duties. David is a type of Christ the Lord, who has authority to determine the order in God's house, which is the Church of the living God. So He tells us how we ought to conduct ourselves in His holy temple. He does this *through the Spirit*, and the order within the Church bears the mark of it. It is not an order devised by men, but the order of the Spirit in conformity with the instructions of the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33,40).

This also holds true for the work of the 'singers,' who are still present today since Christ Himself is the Chief Musician of His people and sings praises to His God and Father in the midst of the congregation (Ps. 22:22; Heb. 2:12). After His resurrection from the dead, God put a new song in His mouth: the song of triumph and of salvation. This song has resounded in our hearts and as the redeemed of the Lord we join Him in it (Ps. 40:3). This new song is an eternal song of praise to the honour and glory of the *Lamb* who was slain (Rev. 5:9). Similarly, the work of the temple singers was, to a certain extent, a permanent activity that was associated with the *sacrifices* on the altar of burnt offering.

The service of singing in the house of the Lord was not mentioned in connection with the tabernacle service. It appears to be a new institution introduced by David, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' (2 Sam. 23:1). The tabernacle was God's house during the wilderness journey, and that journey certainly did not inspire singing. As far as we know, the people of Israel only sang twice in the wilderness, i.e. right at the beginning and almost at the end of their journey. We find the song of Moses after the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15), and the song of praise in connection with the wells through which God invigorated His people when they had reached the border of Moab (Num. 21). Israel also danced around the golden calf and sung there, but that song was a disgrace to God.

Not in the wilderness, but only in the promised land did the time of singing come, to use the words of the Song of Solomon (2:12). This did not happen immediately after Israel's entry into Canaan, but only in the days of David and Solomon. Then a time of peace and quietness prevailed, a rest needed for the establishment of a permanent sanctuary for the LORD and for a regular worship to the honour of His name. Actually, the appointment of the singers was associated with finding a final resting place for the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence, when it was no longer needed to lead the people in battle against the enemies. So rest in the kingdom of peace was a requirement for the temple service and the work of the temple singers (see 1 Chr. 6:31,32; 15:15-17; 22:19; 28:2ff; 2 Chr. 6:41,42; Ps. 132).

A period of rest, a 'man of rest' and a 'house of rest' were needed for the introduction of a regular worship and a permanent song of praise to God's glory and honour. The ministry of the Levitical singers was based on this situation of peace and quietness in the land. God's good hand was over His people, and He looked with favour on them. The ark had found its resting place on Mount Zion. God dwelled in the midst of His people, and the king after His own heart reigned by the grace of God. For this reason the Levites could continually sing, "His mercy endures forever." This chorus was first heard when David brought the ark to its resting place in Jerusalem, and it was sung again when the ark was brought into the temple (1 Chr. 16:34,41; 2 Chr. 5:13).

Obviously, this has great significance for us too. Just as God's mercies for Israel were sure in the person of the anointed king, we are sure of His grace in His beloved Son. Christ is our perfect Representative and Head, and God has exalted Him to be Lord of all. Through Him we are now the objects of God's favour. Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have peace with God, and through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand (Rom 5:1-2). Through Him, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and been translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, the Man after His own heart (Col. 1:13). This is a kingdom of light and love — a kingdom of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Then shouldn't we, too, break into a song of praise, thanking Him for His endless mercy, His eternal goodness? For us, too, the time of rest and of singing has come. We know the Prince of Peace who has found a resting place in the midst of His people. So we can be thankful and happy. The song that God's mercy endures forever, is an endless song that resounds in our midst to the glory and honour of the Father and of the Son. This song of praise will resound in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. So we can conclude that now, too, the 'choirs' are lined up in God's temple to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 2:17-22; 5:19).

In Colossians 3:16, our songs of praise are clearly connected with mutual instruction, teaching, and admonition: "Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace (that is, conscious of grace — 'for His mercy endures forever') in your hearts to the Lord" (KJV). Therefore the singing also contains a prophetic element; it contains something that is to the edification of others. Not only is God honoured by it, but our fellow believers are also edified in their faith. It is very interesting to note that it is said of the temple singers in 1 Chronicles 25, that they *prophesied* (vv. 1,2,3,5). They sang *and* they prophesied. Their songs of praise were meant to glorify God, but also to instruct His people.

I would like to close with a few words on the position of the Levitical singers in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah — the same time in which the author of the Chronicles lived and remembered the former glory under king David and king Solomon. A remnant had returned to the promised land, to the place where the Lord had caused His name to dwell. By the rivers of Babylon, the singers had hung their harps upon the willows. How could they possibly sing one of the songs of Zion, the Lord's song, in a foreign land? How could they sing there about Zion, about the mountain of God's grace, about the sanctuary of the one true God and the reign of His king (Ps. 137)?

But as soon as they returned to Jerusalem, they resumed their duties. It was a day of revival, of restoration, and rebuilding of the altar, the temple, and the city wall, respectively. When the foundation of the new temple had been laid, we hear the singers sing again. Once again, they sang the chorus that God's mercy endures forever (Ezra 3:10-11). The choirs also had a very significant role in celebrating the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27ff). Everything took place according to the command of David and Solomon his son, "for in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgivings to God" (Neh. 12:45-46). And so, we too, in a time of decline, should return to the institutions God has delivered to His Church from the very beginning through the risen Lord and His apostles. At the restoration of true worship around the Christian altar, the Table of the Lord, the singers should also be set in their place to sing the endless song of praise to God in His holy temple.