

**The Battle of Conquerors (12)**

—G. H. Elbers

*Chapter 16*

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18).*

With this verse we have actually come to the end of the armour of God. But...is prayer a weapon?

Maybe it's not exactly a weapon, but it certainly has its place in the arsenal! To speak in army terms: prayer is the link to headquarters.

*Emphasis on 'all Saints'*

Paul noted a number of parts which the warrior had to use in order to be able to stand firm in the battle which so often is heavy. Now we encounter something very special. In this portion he emphasizes that we are not just to pray for ourselves but for all saints! This is because the struggle involves every one of us!

Imagine, there is a heavy battle going on and the soldiers on the front line have to do all they can to stand firm. How good for them to know that others are praying for them during their battle and that others are keeping in contact with 'Headquarters'!

*If we ourselves are unable...*

Just let's apply this very practically. Every believer knows that the attacks and wiles of the evil one can thoroughly confuse him or her. Doubts, temptations, stress, and even sin... At such moments it seems so difficult to stand firm. Yes, it sometimes seems impossible to pray at such moments! Do you recognize such feelings? Did you ever experience something like that in your own life?

It is wonderful to know that nevertheless there is Someone who always prays and intercedes for us. This is the Lord Jesus, as we read in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25. He can help those who are tempted because He Himself suffered temptation. And so He does (Heb. 2:18).

In spite of this, all believers have the task to pray for each other. If we read verse 18 carefully, we discover that it speaks of *persistent* prayer! Literally: continual prayer and supplication. That one word 'supplication' emphasizes once more the seriousness of the situation. Let us never underestimate the battle...

The apostle Paul certainly did not do so, seeing the many times he wrote that we have to pray for the believers, the saints, and the chosen ones.

To see this, just look at Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon :4.

*Praying always, at every opportunity...*

Elsewhere we read: "unceasingly" (1 Th. 5:17) — always. These words too are of utmost importance. We know ourselves that when we have problems, sickness, or a need, we suddenly have the tendency to pray much. At such moments we are once more confronted with the fact: "Of ourselves we can do nothing." But why to pray so much only when there is something special?

What about... when it affects others? And what about when we look around us and see how Satan is devastating the

families and the marriages of our beloved brothers and sisters? Are we then such intercessors as well? Do we really pray persistently when we see how the temptations and wiles of the principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and evil spirits (Eph 6:12) threaten us and our fellow believers? Or do we only do this when things actually go wrong? When it is (seemingly) too late?

Ephesians 6:18 teaches us to pray at every opportunity, always, without ceasing. That's possible in our private prayers, during our quiet times, during the prayer meeting in the assembly, or at any time, whenever the opportunity presents itself. As we said already: We must not underestimate the battle, but neither the power and value of prayer. Even ours!

### *Watching Thereunto...*

Again a few important words which have everything to do with the seriousness of the topic. Watching means: stay awake, eyes open, pay attention! Just as a traffic officer must keep his eyes on the traffic stream in order to be able to intervene when it jams up. Just as a general must follow the course of the battle in order to be able to react in time to changes.

In Nehemiah 4 we find recorded how Nehemiah with God's help found the solution to the threat of a strong enemy: half of the people built the walls, while the other half carried weapons. Many even built with one hand, while carrying a spear in the other. Some were guarding day and night; some never put off their clothes (Neh. 4:22-23). That was watching! The watchmen immediately reported when the enemy tried to attack, so that God's people could form a united front against each threat.

In his epistle the apostle Peter also gave warnings: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul wrote at the end of his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). He warned the believers to be watchful after he made them aware of the 'success of the devil' in the Assembly. For there was contention (1:11), carnal thinking (2:14; 3:1), pride (4:7,18), terrible fornication (5:1), quarreling and injustice (6:1-9), and many such things. These terrible things could only sneak into the assembly because of a lack of vigilance... A serious warning and lesson for us all!

Finally, Paul had already emphatically warned the Ephesians in Acts 20:28-31 for the temptations and wiles of the enemy. Moreover he had been using the same words in verse 31: 'Therefore watch...'

### *Praying in (the) Spirit*

If we are vigilant, then what and how should we pray? How can we discover if there is something wrong, that the devil is trying to sneak into our lives, our marriage, our family or into the assembly? How do I know what I should pray and where the dangers are? The answer lies in praying in (the) Spirit. This does not mean that something should happen to us first! Or that we should pray emotionally in a trance or in tongues. No! It simply means that God's Spirit Himself has to show us what is going on!

God's Word teaches us that every child of God has received the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:38-39; Rom. 5:5-6; 8:23; 1 Cor. 6:19). This Spirit wants to work in us and help us when we don't know what we should pray (Rom. 8:26), so that we can pray according to God's will (1 Jn. 5:14).

And this happens when there are no hindrances. In simple terms: praying *in* (the) Spirit is not praying for the Spirit, it is not praying *to* the Spirit, but... prayer *led by* the Spirit. He will bring to mind what and for whom we can pray. He is the one who will open our eyes to the things happening around us. Once again, if there are no hindrances!

### *Receiving the Word and Praying*

Accepting the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) and praying for all saints (vv. 17-18) are closely linked together. One cannot exist without the other! Someone said that Bible reading can be compared with breathing in and prayer with breathing out. This is a striking example, because just breathing in or just breathing out is impossible...

One who wants to pray, but neglects or puts aside God's Word, cannot pray in (the) Spirit. This is, because God's Spirit is speaking to us from God's Word and brings to our minds only what is in perfect conformity with that Word. The two belong together!

## *For all Saints*

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we are called upon to pray for *all men*. But here in Ephesians 6:18 where it speaks about the battle of faith, the Lord teaches us to pray for *all saints*. This is because only the *saints* have to do with the battle in heavenly places! It speaks of those who belong to the Lord Jesus, of our brothers and sisters. In Ephesians 1:2 they (along with us) are called 'the saints and believers in Christ Jesus!' Those *saints* are personally, but also collectively, as Assembly, confronted with the attacks of Satan.

Thus... pray with each other and for each other! That is practically applying what the Lord has made of us: a unity in Him. Let us then really pray for all saints, so that we can also stand firm together.

## *Chapter 17*

As we saw in the previous chapter, prayer, too, is an important component of the armour of God. I concluded with; "Let us then really pray for all saints, so that we can stand together."

## *Singular or Plural?*

Having come just about to the end of this study, I would like to ask this question of all of us. Is the armour intended for each of us personally or... for the Assembly? Is it singular or plural? Maybe you hadn't noticed before, but Ephesians 6 follows chapters 1 through 5... And whoever has read these chapters will surely have noticed that they consistently talk about the Assembly (and thus believers together). For that matter, Paul directed his letter clearly to 'the saints and believers (or faithful)!' So that is plural! This gives a very special value to the 'instructions.'

One can show that the thoughts and instructions contained in literally every chapter therein are intended for *all*. Linguistically, too, this is easy to recognize: we regularly find the so-called 'imperative plural' (for example very clearly in 2:11; 4:25; 5:22,25; 6:1,4-5,9). Then, pointing to our topic, the verses 6:10,13,14,16,17 and 18 very clearly point out the fact that the believers together, as Assembly, must put on the armour and use it! [this more evident in the Dutch — *the translator*]

## *Important!*

We must imprint this on our minds! Naturally the instructions and charges (withstand, stand fast) apply to every Christian individually. But as we shall find out by reading further, the Assembly must also be well aware that God gave an armour because it, being the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4; Col. 1:24), as well as being the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15) and the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7), yes in every 'respect,' will be confronted with the wiles and temptations of the evil one and his powers! This may all sound very complicated, but it's not! Let's have a look at several examples:

## *The Assembly as Pillar and Foundation of the Truth*

Is there any thing at all that has to face more attacks than the truth? Satan, being the father of lies, certainly has a great interest in bringing false teachings, traditions, and wrong habits into the Assembly. This always has been so. Especially the Ephesians, to whom Paul wrote about the armour, had to be warned and corrected because they seemed to be wandering away (read Acts 20:17,30; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Rev. 2:2,5). Satan tried to shroud the truth, God's truth, in order to smuggle in his own destructive ideas. Oh, the need for the truth was as real for the Ephesians as it is today for the Assembly. Think for a moment about the armour... what was the first component mentioned? The truth!

## *The Assembly as the Body of Christ*

This beautiful example, given by God Himself, points to oneness and bond, existing both between it and the Head (Christ), and between the members mutually (1 Cor. 12). Now, we all know that Christendom shows a shameful disunity! That was certainly not God's intention. There are those that dare to say that the disunity is good because it shows the multi-coloured wisdom of God (Eph 3:10). A sorrowful explanation for a sorry matter!

The Lord Jesus prayed so emphatically: "That they should be one... even as We are one" (Jn. 17:21,23). Paul, too, asked the assembly at Corinth: "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:3). No, a body in which the members are not well attached to each other can never function as intended by the Creator. Satan understood this very well. That's why he is all too eager to open his attacks there where the armour is standing in a corner and isn't given any attention.

### *The Assembly as the House of God*

First Corinthians 3 speaks about the building materials and the Occupant of the house. In 1 Timothy 3:15 attention is called to the behaviour in the house, the Assembly. The working out of the significance of this is a study on its own which is not in order here. What I would like to point out is, that the 'rulers of darkness of this world, the spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12), will try anything to make the building a ruin. When we note the decline pictured in Revelation 2 and 3, it seems that it is pretty well accomplished. How necessary it is to use the armour to be able, also as Assembly, to stand firm and to fend off the temptations. Many comments can be made about the conduct of believers in the house of God. There are so many 'strange' building materials being used by them, who are thinking that they themselves have to build an assembly... Can that at all be to the honour of the Occupant?

### *The Assembly as the Bride of the Lamb*

Another beautiful and clear example. Isn't it wonderful that the Lord Jesus would compare His relationship with the Assembly with that of a bridegroom and a bride, as a man and a wife who belong to each other? (By the way, how holy and pure is marriage in the eyes of God!)

Yes, then we must say that in that respect, too, many things are totally wrong. Not on God's side! Not because there is any unfaithfulness on the side of the Lord Jesus! The very thought of it...! But the devil has success upon success when it comes to having us commit 'spiritual adultery.'

Isn't it striking that again it has to be written to the church of Ephesus of all places: "But I have somewhat against you, that you have lost your first love." Those are the words of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2:4. Unfortunately we actually have to apply similar words to the entire present-day Assembly.

### *The Assembly and the local Assembly*

Local assemblies (note that we always used a capital 'A' when speaking of the one worldwide Assembly and a lower case 'a' when speaking of local assemblies) are a reflection of the Assembly in his entirety. That means that whatever is written for the Assembly in its entirety also applies to the local assembly! And vice versa!

Where do we still find that strong, devoted, and pure love to the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus? Where is the love in return to Him who gave Himself for it (the Church), to sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27)?

We can imagine that love and devotion *to* the Lord and *from* the Lord is a real irritation to the devil and his henchmen. He will go all out to bring about an affiliation between the world and the Assembly.

We see this indeed at those places where politics, commerce, union work, revolution, and liberty fights are linked to the things of the Lord. Countless 'spiritual leaders' have thereby taken their sheep from the green pastures of Psalm 23 and led them into the fields of Moab and Shittim! There spiritual adultery is committed today, just as it happened literally and figuratively in Numbers 25:1-3 and as it is referred to in the address to the church in Pergamos in Revelation 2:14. A terrible defilement with all kinds of religions and movements has resulted from this.

Is an armour necessary or not? Also, or especially, for the Assembly?

### *Reason for discouragement?*

No! There is no reason for discouragement, to the contrary. It is, however, a reason for humbling ourselves. At the same

time Christians may hold fast unto the certainty that through the use of God's armour it is possible to stand firm!

We have taken all its components into close consideration and have seen that its quality is excellent. Obviously! The armour is God's own design.

Now what to do when we, either personally or as Assembly, are confronted with the attacks which we fear we cannot handle? In any case: don't give up, don't become discouraged, and certainly don't think that we can't resist Satan. We must begin by determining for ourselves that the battle has already been fought by the Lord Jesus and... successfully so.

One last time: we who believe are therefore — with Him — more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). That must be our starting-point. Is there any reason then to be despondent? Not at all! Let us constantly, thankfully, ascertain that the victory wasn't a temporary matter. It is for ever and ever!

Well, that's what the armour is for, so that we, individually and collectively, can stand firm!

### *Epilogue*

We are thankful that brother Gerard H. Elbers was still able to rewrite these studies, which he had earlier published in the Surinam monthly *Hanoë Makandra*.

Because of serious health problems he was transferred to the Netherlands shortly before his rewriting was ready for the printer; there he went to be with the Lord after a year of suffering. The Biblical truths described in these studies were surely no less true for him during this year. Time and again there was hope of being able to return to Surinam to continue the work he had been allowed to do there for his Lord and to write more Bible-studies and other articles. He is now relieved from this task.

Now he is allowed to see his Lord and Saviour in glory, after having witnessed of Him to so many people during his life. He did so especially in the period from 1983-1993 while he was working as a missionary in Surinam (formerly Dutch Guyana in South-America).

His battle has been fought. We do hope that for you, who are still standing in the midst of it, his studies will be a help and an encouragement, especially enabling you to stand firm as a Christian.

*The End*

## **The Business Meeting**

—Alan H. Crosby

### *Introduction*

The question has been raised, "Where in Scripture do we find the business meeting and what are its functions?" The purpose of this article is to provide some answers for this question.

It is true that we do not find the words "business meeting" in Scripture, but nevertheless, we do find business meetings. In these meetings, assemblies assigned tasks, commended "laborers," allocated funds, dealt with assembly problems, and other matters that might arise. The Lord Himself anticipated the need for business meetings when He gave the assembly authority to make whatever decisions might be necessary (Mt. 18:18-20).

### Functions of the Business Meeting

#### *Tasks are Assigned*

Initially, the assembly met only for teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:41,42), but almost immediately there arose the need for a business meeting (Acts 6: 1-5)! The apostles had been waiting on tables and in so doing they were being taken away from work the Lord had called them to do. Others could wait on tables! Therefore, the apostles told the assembly to propose well-qualified men whom they could "establish over this business" (Acts 6:5 JND)

and then "the whole multitude chose Stephen... and Philip... and Prochorus," and four others besides. It takes no great insight to see that for the multitude to propose and choose suitable men they assembled and transacted this business at a meeting, the first business meeting.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 16 we see that the need had arisen for men to be assigned to the task of taking funds to Jerusalem. The apostle writes, "When I am arrived whomsoever ye shall approve, these I will send with letters to carry your bounty to Jerusalem" (v. 3). Now just how and where were these men to be chosen? At a business meeting, no doubt!

#### *Laborers, Missionaries, and such are Commended.*

Acts 13:1-3 strongly implies the participation of the assembly in the sending forth of Paul and Barnabas. Here, we see the leaders of the Assembly, led by the Holy Spirit, making it known that Paul and Barnabas should go forth as "laborers" in the work whereunto the Lord had called them. Then, the leaders representing the assembly, laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas to express fellowship in and invoke blessing on the work they were undertaking. Note, this can not possibly be ordination because Paul was already an apostle! Acts 22:21; Acts 26:15-18). Commendation is not "ordination."

#### *Funds Are Allocated (or Budgeted)*

For example, laborers who travel, and that includes missionaries, are to be supported by the assembly. Paul says to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:8-9 NIV), "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you." This was not an isolated case. He says to the Philippians (Phil. 4:16 NIV), "Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent to me again and again." Scripture says of those whose labour is predominately local (1 Tim. 5:17-18): "Let the elders who take the lead among the saints well be esteemed worthy of double honour, specially those labouring in word and teaching; for the Scripture says, The workman is worthy of his hire."

Money is to be allocated at the business meeting to needy people who are not "labourers." Acts 11:27-29 shows that the assembly decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. The prophecy of Agabus that there would be widespread need was brought up, and the assembly decided to send money to them, and they did so, sending it with Paul and Barnabas.

Local people are also to be provided for. Scripture says, "Let a widow be put on the list, [1] being of not less than sixty years, [2] having been the wife of one man, [3] borne witness to in good works, [4] if she have borne children, [5] if she have exercised hospitality... [6] if she have imparted relief to the distressed, [7] if she diligently followed every good work" (1 Tim. 5:9-10 JND). Verse 16 clearly shows that this provision for the needy is assembly business, for it says, "If any believing man or woman have widows, let them impart relief to them and let not the assembly be charged (so) that it may impart relief to those that are widows indeed." The assembly is to impart relief! For it to do so, the name of the person having need must be brought up, the qualifications and disqualifications pointed out, and the proposal to help considered and evaluated by the assembly. This obviously would be done by the assembly at a business meeting.

#### *Assembly Problems are Considered*

An assembly meeting may be required to take care of matters of discipline. For example, the Corinthian Assembly was told, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Co r. 5:13). A meeting where this is done would obviously be a business meeting.

An assembly meeting may be required to correct improper teaching and behaviour; For example, in Galatians 2:14, we see Paul taking up a serious problem before them all. Paul "said unto Peter before them all, If thou being a Jew livest after the manner of Gentiles... why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" He then continued with his discussion through six more verses! Obviously, this was a business meeting.

The assembly may need to resolve disputes. The Lord Jesus Himself tells us that if we cannot settle a matter privately, it should be brought before the assembly (Mt. 18:15-17). Also, in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 we are told not to go to law against another Christian but to have the dispute settled in the assembly, presumably following the procedure outlined by the Lord in Matthew 18. A meeting of the assembly where such matters are settled could reasonably be called a business meeting.

## *Considering and Deciding upon Collective Good Works*

Hebrews 10:24-25 implicitly enjoins an assembly to decide upon specific good works at a business meeting. These verses say in part: "Let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works... encouraging one another." The part left out says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Now why did the Holy Spirit stick this phrase right in the middle? Obviously because the assembling of ourselves is related to the provoking to good works! Could it be that the weakness in the testimony of many assemblies is related to the failure to consider collective good works regularly in business meetings?

### *Conclusion*

The Lord authorized the business meeting when He gave the assembly authority to make whatever decisions that are necessary. He said, "If two of you shall agree on the earth concerning any matter... it shall come to them... For where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:19-20).

This article is not a plea for the use of the words "business meeting" but rather for the importance of such meetings, by whatever name they are called, for the effective functioning of any assembly. Would it not be wonderful if each assembly were so involved in doing the Lord's business that it needed a business meeting each week?

## **The Prophecy of Zephaniah (2)**

—H. L. Rossier

### Chapter 1 — General Judgment Over The Entire Creation, Over Judah and Jerusalem, and Over The Living

#### *The Judgment That Will Come Over Creation*

*"I will utterly take away everything from off the face of the ground, saith Jehovah: I will take away man and beast; I will take away the fowl of the heavens and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked, and I will cut off mankind from off the face of the ground, saith Jehovah" (Zeph. 1:2-3).*

These verses announce a *general* judgment, in contrast to the judgment in verse 4 which will fall upon Judah and Jerusalem, but which is closely connected to it. The judgment over Judah is so much the more serious because it has sinned in the same way as the nations.

The character of this common sin is mentioned in verse 17: "They have sinned against Jehovah." The things that will be destroyed by the judgment point to the cause of it. In verse 3 we find the four main groups of living beings, which according to the Bible together form the living creation: men, animals (including cattle, creeping animals), the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the heavens (Gen. 1).

Why to have this destruction? Deuteronomy 4:15-19 gives us the answer. The Lord had admonished His people to take careful distance from the idolatry of the nations. "For," He says, "ye saw no form on the day that Jehovah spoke to you in Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the form of any figure, the pattern of male or female, the pattern of any beast that is on the earth, the pattern of any winged fowl that flieth in the heaven, the pattern of anything that creepeth on the ground, the pattern of any fish that is in the waters under the earth; and lest thou lift up thine eyes to the heavens, and see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, the whole host of heaven, and be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them." This the nations had done, who "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into *the* likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles." (Rom. 1:23).

Therefore the Lord would destroy all these 'abominations,' the animals and man of whom they had made themselves idols and eradicate the godless ones who had given themselves over to them in their service. But what would happen to Judah?

#### *Judgment over Judah and Jerusalem*

*"I will stretch forth my hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal*

*from this place, the name of the Chemarim with the priests; and them that bow down to the host of the heavens upon the housetops; and them that bow down to Jehovah, that swear by Him, and swear by Malcham; and them that turn back from after Jehovah, and that do not seek Jehovah, nor inquire for Him" (vv. 4-6).*

One could be surprised that more than once in the prophets the most serious threats against the people are uttered precisely at the moment that a king after God's heart interrupted the string of godless kings of Judah. But we must be mindful of this, that the revivals had not changed the spiritual condition of the people, as Zephaniah himself testified.

For that matter, this is the case in every revival. Although by it a serious appeal is made to the people to repent, their unchanging failure proves that the world does definitely not want to know anything about God. No doubt, by His grace revivals bring about a temporary halt in the execution of the judgments as long as God by the preaching of the gospel gathers souls. Thereby the judgment is kept from reaching its summit; this we see in our days. It is as with brakes: though they decrease the speed, they do not prevent a car driving down a steep incline to arrive at the lowest point in the valley. Besides, we should not forget that God has always the past of man before Him, although that man would readily throw the veil of forgetfulness over it. God could not forget the idolatry of Judah during the reign of Manasseh, not even when, through judgment, this king had been restored. Under Josiah's rule a reformation took place, but it was not a true-hearted conversion of the people. Nothing was more remote from conversion than the habit to link the service of idols with that of the true God, who cannot bear wickedness linked to the solemn meeting (Isa. 1:13). On the other hand, revivals are events for great blessing: Souls are saved and drawn from the world to form a faithful remnant in the midst of general unfaithfulness. And so it will be until the end. The remnant out of Israel and that out of the nations will have no other origin than the revivals brought about by "the preaching of righteousness" at Jerusalem (Dan. 12:3), and "the gospel of the kingdom" in Israel and among the nations (Mt. 24:14).

#### *Mixing of the Service of God With That of Idols*

In actual fact Josiah's reformation had changed the bad moral condition of the people into an even much worse one. God hates idolatry. Even more He hates the mixing of His service with that of the false gods. A heart that is totally unfamiliar with God, a soul that is plunged in deep darkness and that has never received a direct revelation of the divine light, is less guilty than those who, despite their knowing the truth, join themselves to heathen practices. This condition, of which the Jewish house has stayed pure for a season, is seen today in what is called the "Christian" world. In the past, the severe judgment of the Lord came over Israel because it has celebrated "a feast to the Lord around the golden calf." So it was too with the service of calves at Dan and Bethel. While honouring the idols, the people had a certain knowledge of the true God, but this mixing was exactly what God abhorred so greatly in Judah. The revival had not produced any other result than this for the people. True enough, the Baal service had lost its popularity. Yet he was not altogether gone, for Zephaniah spoke of a "remnant of Baal" (v. 4). But a diminishing of idolatry is not yet a returning to God. Personally Josiah had completely broken with Baal and he led the people on that way. Judah, however, had halted halfway and made a compromise. The priests of the true God walked side by side with those of Baal, the Chemarim, the white and black robes, met each other in Jerusalem's streets. Other religions, seemingly less rude, continued to entice the people. They bowed "down to the host of the heavens upon the housetops." That was a secret service that Josiah could not control very well, nor cause to cease. When the law was found again in the temple, Israel could have ascertained what God thought of these idolatrous practices. God's goodness had "assigned [the heavenly bodies] unto all peoples under the whole heaven," to "give light upon the earth" (Dt. 4:19; Gen. 1:14-17). But the people, who made the heavenly bodies their "host," bowed themselves also for the Lord. They gave to created, lifeless things the same authority as to the Creator of heaven and earth. Strange deception! What is man not capable of! Sin has separated him from God and he does not know Him anymore! The prophet added: They "swear by *Him*, and swear by Malcham." Always the same departure! They took God as witness, but Malcham, the god of the children of Ammon too (Jer. 49:1,3); they swore therefore simultaneously by the Lord and the devil.

There was yet a fourth type of transgressors, more serious than the others, those who "turn back from after Jehovah, and who do not seek Jehovah, nor inquire for Him." God did say: "If he draw back, My soul does not take pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). When someone draws back from God, he chooses in fact hell above Him. An ambiguous religion, that wants to join the world and God, leads ultimately always to "wilfully sinning," for which "there no longer remains any sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and heat of fire about to devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27). "To turn back from the Lord" will also be the course of the Jewish people in the last days. After this nation will have recovered for a time the continuous burnt-offering — the Jewish service in the restored temple — it will allow itself to be deceived by the "wonders of falsehood" of "the man of sin" and find "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Th. 2).

These unbelievers will "hasten after another," as Psalm 16:4 tells us, and "their sorrows shall be multiplied."

*To be cont'd*



## The Great House

—J. van Dijk

*But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20-21).*

In these verses the apostle Paul uses a parable. He is speaking of conditions within the assembly during the last days, when ruin has come in to such an extent that only the Lord truly knows those who are His. During those days anyone who wants to walk faithfully must of necessity strive for two things. First, he needs to maintain himself pure — a matter that will involve separation from what is defiled. Secondly, he needs to discern with whom to have fellowship, with whom to pursue faith, love, and peace. To guide Timothy in this difficult task, Paul uses the parable of a great house. Not that he spends many words on the subject. He clearly expects Timothy to understand the similitude he is using, and its obvious application.

Today much has been written about this verse (the parable is only one verse long), and many have discussed the intent of what Paul is trying to convey. It is remarkable that a verse we find apparently difficult to understand, must have been beyond dispute to Timothy. One can hardly assume that God would have Paul write in terms not readily understood by his reader. Thus we are convinced its meaning was simple and clear to Timothy. That leaves the question why is it not simple to us? In answer I like to make a few suggestions.

When we read this parable we quickly conclude that Christendom today is a great house. This conclusion is close to the truth, but not completely so, I believe. As an example of what I mean let us look at a different subject. Christ says of the bread He broke when instituting the Lord's supper: "This [bread] is My body." We know that with these words Christ said: "This bread represents My body." In cases like these we should not say the bread is Christ's body. And so it is here, we should not say: The Church *is* a great house; it is *like* a great house. All we can say is that the great house is *a picture* of the Church. Now let us see what we know about a great house in general.

Paul helps us along by mentioning the essential point of interest to us in what he intends to convey. He refers to the vessels in a great house. In particular he speaks of the inherent character of the vessels, and secondly he refers to their uses. We can ask any housewife how she uses her vessels, her pots and pans. Those of metal are generally used for the preparation of food, whereas those of wood and stone serve lesser purposes. Though there may be some overlap in usefulness, we all know that mother does not boil soup in a wooden vessel. It plainly is not suited for such use. The metal ones, however, are pretty well useful for any purpose. Speaking of the uses made of the various vessels, no one need to be told that a golden dish that by chance has just been used for some dirty work (I guess that does not happen in your house too often) will not be used to serve as a fruit dish immediately after. Nor would a silver cup that has been stored with some dirty vessels under the sink be used as a drinking cup for an honoured guest before it has been thoroughly cleansed. We know better than that.

It is abundantly clear to us that in a great house the first essential is to differentiate between the inherent character of the vessels. Paul clearly speaks of two distinct types of vessels, those grouped under gold and silver, and separately those grouped under wood and earthen. But of near equal importance is the question whether or not a vessel has been kept in a clean and proper condition. If so, the metal ones will be available for pretty well any purpose for which the mistress of the house would like to use it. Now that we have given full consideration to the practical conditions in a great house, we can begin to look at the next verse, which contains its application.

These persons are compared to vessels. The first question to answer is in what manner should we apply the similitude of gold and silver on the one hand and wooden and earthen on the other. For this we need the help of other Scripture portions in which these materials are spoken of. For instance 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 these materials are spoken of as symbolizing the quality of our works. Gold and silver are mentioned as well as wood. There all will be tested by fire and that what remains is what will be rewarded, the rest will be burned up. It does not need much wisdom to see that only that which is identified with gold and silver has value for God. And so it is here. The fact that Paul grouped the vessels in the house in two distinct groups helps us to realize that also here it is a question of vessels that have value for God and vessels that miss such value. This conclusion is also justified by verse 19 which did introduce the difficulty of distinguishing between that which has value for God and that which has not. From this part we therefore conclude that Paul tells us that in Christendom in its last-days condition there will be both believers and unbelievers within the company that is known on

earth as the Church.

If we have understood the parable of the great house well, we will have little difficulty to know what the first part of verse 21 speaks of. "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these." Unfortunately we do not have in the English language a word that does justice to the Greek word translated "purified." It is a strong word, and to bring out its full sense of the Greek text the New Translation by J. N. Darby adds the words "in separating himself from them." It is a purification that can only be accomplished by a definite keeping apart. Now let us be clear about this: a dirty golden vessel is nevertheless a golden vessel. Similarly, a true Christian who does not purify himself by separation is nevertheless a true Christian. Unfortunately, just like the golden vessel found in a great house under the kitchen sink mixed with the cleansers and dirty brushes is not suited for serving a part of the meal, so too, the not separated Christian is not suited *for every good work*. He may not be useless, but his usefulness is certainly greatly restricted. On the other hand, the vessel that has purified itself can be used by the Lord for whatever good work for which the Lord wants to use him at any given time. I suppose that is how we all would like to be for the Lord, isn't it?

Maybe there is one more aspect to consider. Suppose the mistress of the great house prepared to give a big banquet. She searches for all her best vessels and puts them on the kitchen table. Suddenly she remembers the golden dish holding the dishcloth under the sink. Would she pick it up and put it with her sparkling dishes on the kitchen table! Of course not! If someone mixed the dirty with the clean she would immediately say: Now I have to wash all of them! She would not be happy, indeed. Do you think the Lord is happy when we mix the defiled with the undefiled?

Those are lessons of a great house. They are really so simple, nobody needs any explanation. Nobody that is, except Christians who endlessly discuss the spiritual application. This latter scene is all too often found among otherwise truehearted Christians, and the whole lot is defiled. I believe Paul did not expand too largely on his parable because it is so self-evident, it hardly needs explanation. But Paul's limited remarks about the great house hinder us from letting the character of an actual great house sink in thoroughly, so that we may better understand the similarity between it and the spiritual house.

It seems to me that the idea of the Church having become a great house has caused us to focus far too quickly on the conditions found within the Church. The lessons of this short parable are best learned by first focusing on a great house and its practical conditions. Once one understands the reality of a practical house, it becomes abundantly clear that also in the spiritual realm separation needs to be not just between the gold and wood, the saved and the not-saved, but also between the saved who are defiled and the saved who are not defiled. This is the serious lesson Paul wanted Timothy to understand. That this raises the question: Who is defiled? is obvious, but this is a study subject by itself.

### **True Humiliation**

—C. B. Beekhuizen

How great is our God that He is willing to make Himself known to us as the I AM! Yes how great is God's grace to at last turn Himself to humanity in THE SON OF HIS LOVE (Heb. 1:1)!

When we have to live through moments of enormous stress that burden the soul to its limit, troubling and overwhelming the soul, how encouraging is it then to experience when someone, perhaps without words, gives a firm handshake or casts an encouraging eye on an anxious soul. A handshake or putting a hand on someone may not happen carelessly, but at the right moment, administered as medicine, it has nevertheless the effect of Isaiah 50:4-10. Also the tear of pity and sympathy will not fail to have its effect in cases in which the soul has to endure an overpowering experience.

The tears at Lazarus' tomb had a real effect on friend and enemy, and the hand on the apostle John had the effect of life out of death (Rev. 1:17).

So it was also with the downcast prophet Daniel. He was left alone with the vision out of heaven. A hand touched him, so that he moved on his knees and the palms of his hands (Dan. 10:10).

On Patmos it was the same hand, now marked with the tokens of the crucifixion, that strengthened John. In spirit it was these hands that the prophet Zechariah saw — tokens of love, but also tokens of the hatred of men set on killing the Messiah!

Well, such a hand lies on you and me when we humble ourselves about our condition, while longing for restoration. What

a glory and grace! Pierced with nails that hands of sinful men had driven through them, it is a hand which, full of grace, is willing to reach out and give us all we need here on earth! Can you understand it? I can't!

Still trembling in his bones, Daniel rose up to listen further to God's encouraging words. "Fear not." How did he need those words! Ever again these words are filled with glorious power. At sea in a raging storm, in prison with a ripped-open back, during shipwreck, and while giving account before kings and magistrates, always these words echo in the soul of the believer who puts his trust in Jesus Christ.

Don't we all know the anxiety that grips our hearts at the announcement of an important visit of someone we value and esteem? And don't we all quickly put everything in order that could possibly hinder that guest? What a mess we suddenly find there where at first it did not catch our eye! How much more then should we have our lives in order and to restore our mutual relationships, "and that so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh."

How must Daniel have wondered that he was allowed to hear such encouraging words, "Thou art one greatly beloved"! Involuntarily we sit up straight at these words: Did we hear right? And what about our shortcomings? Our failures, our weak reflection of God's love?

These questions, demanding an answer, beset our soul at such moments. Often we do not hear the answer, but experience an infinite warm loveliness in and around us, causing us to kneel down in silent worship while our eyes fill with tears, while our mouth is not able to give expression to the feelings that control us at such a moment. So it was with the prophet. And how is it with you?

In Daniel 10:15 we see this event. Daniel is dumb-struck, just as the prophet in Ezekiel 3.

Words do not befit us at such a moment; the waiting is on Him who again touches us in His patient, healing love (v. 16). As soon as the tongue is loosened, the prophet lays bare his great need. He would greatly love to begin a normal conversation with His God, thanking Him for His love! No, when he arrived at the number seventy, he did not joyfully jump up, glad that the discipline was finally over. He did not call, "Maranatha" when he got insight into the last days. No, he fell as dead before Him who revealed Himself in all His majesty!

But God desires to dwell among men, no matter how loveless and merciless they are! He wants to bring them into relationship with Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, so that His creatures may learn what love and grace with patience is!

"Then there touched me again One like the appearance of a man, and He strengthened me."

Thus Daniel was instructed in God's plan of salvation for this earth and His people Israel. What an experience! With Paul in Romans 11:33 we cry: "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways!"

From the moment in the life of each believer who has seen God's glory in the Son of God's love, there remains nothing of one's own strength. Own wisdom stops functioning, own love flees for God's power. What a difference with what was before! When Isaiah thought to have to begin his task for his God towards his own people, he saw much evil. When he had spoken accusingly, he had used the right words and yet... there had been nothing in them that showed something of the glory of IMMANUEL! Only after he had seen himself in God's light, and like James, had seen *himself* in the mirror of God's law as totally unclean from head to toe — an idea he had earlier applied to the nation — could God reveal to him His plan of salvation, full of grace and truth!

May I ask, Do you see evil among Christians? And what do you say about it? No one will forbid you to say it if God has told you to do so. But if you have not seen yourself in this divine mirror of James 1:23, then the effect of your message is nil.

May God give us a vision of the glory of Him who has loved us and of whom we want to sing so much in our meetings, but of whom we see so little in the relationships among us. What change would mark our lives then, what a genuine, warm interest would there be for the need of others. Then the woes of Paul and Daniel would not have been in vain (Dan. 10:16; Gal. 4:19), and the Lord's prayer would have been answered (Jn. 17:24, 20-21).

"I have made known to them Thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them. (Jn. 17:26).