

The Prophecy of Haggai (2)

—H. L. Rossier

Encouragement to Rebuild the Temple — Chapter 1:1-15

Egoism and Worldliness

"Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come that Jehovah's house should be built" (Ch. 1:2).

Here we see the people's reasoning when God sent Haggai to prophecy. What profit would there be if the work were not completed?

How often do we hear such words uttered among Christians, even among those who begin enthusiastically, but later consider their efforts a waste of time? Only one motive can be found for this: lack of courage fed by fear and a sense of powerlessness to resist the hindrances the enemy puts in their way. Is not this lack of courage a despising of God's power and faithfulness!

In Haggai's prophecy we see, however, that lack of courage was only an excuse. Behind it hid the real reason, though the remnant itself was hardly aware of this, nor understood its seriousness: egoism and worldliness. *"Is it time for you that ye should dwell in your wainscoted houses, while this house lieth waste?" (v. 4).* The people of God considered their own affairs more important than rebuilding of the house of the Lord. They furnished their own quarters cosily and allowed themselves to be occupied with a desire for riches. They wainscoted their own houses, thus pushing the needs of the temple into the background.

The foundations are hardly above ground, when — according to our natural tendencies — we return to our own house and think only of the social well-being of ourselves and our family. We begin to follow Him who had no place to lay His head, but soon we treat Him as a stranger. We hardly give Him a place in the midst of those whom He has redeemed and whom He has made to be "His house." No one can deny that the zeal for God's house does not consume us as it did Him. We relish the comfort of our "well-trimmed" houses, lowering ourselves to the level of "those who dwell upon the earth."

Consider your Ways

Now let us pay attention to the phrase: *"Consider your ways" (v. 5).* In this short prophecy a similar remark occurs five times. We do well to linger a moment and think of the results of our ways: the discipline of the Lord over us because of our worldliness and self-love. *"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes" (v. 6).*

Remember the widely spread truths that the Scriptures teach us about gathering at the Lord's table. What a great blessing we received when we came to know these truths! But what has become of them over the years? To the remnant the prophet had to say, "Ye have brought in little"! Was there a shortage of seed? No, we failed!

God's discipline does not concern only our work but also our person! "Ye drink, but are not filled with drink"! Perhaps we have occupied ourselves much with God's Word. How many interesting questions have become clear, difficulties solved, doctrines established and taught? Has this been not sufficient to refresh our souls? No, the heart remains withered and cold; we keep on drinking without satiating our thirst. Although we all need to "clothe" ourselves, nobody became "warm," we remain cold. And what was stored up for ourselves as fruit of our labour has disappeared through the holes in the bag; nothing has remained!

"Thus says Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and behold it was little; and when ye brought it home, I blew upon it. Wherefore? saith Jehovah of hosts. Because of My house that lieth waste, whilst ye run every man to his own house" (vv. 7-9). Let us for the second time consider our ways. The work we must do according to God's

thoughts is: add living building material to His house. That was not the only labour that the remnant pursued; those of the remnant had tried twice to bring two contradictory things into agreement with each other: the work of God's house, and the satisfying of personal interests. "Ye run every man to his own house." Those things do not go together. In such a combination the labour for God must suffer loss. They had brought in little for God's house. However, He who does not desire divided hearts had "blown upon it." Their little labour had come to nought. Thus was the Lord's judgment over their activities. From the moment they built for themselves, He no longer entrusted the building materials to them.

Isn't it remarkable that the world, which was so quickly ready to hinder the work on God's house, did not show the least resistance while they were running for their own house? Satan is an enemy who discerns things clearly. He knows very well that God's work cannot succeed when the workers have divided hearts.

But notice. Through God's grace, the leaders feared, the people feared and received the message of God's ambassador. The call: "Consider your ways," found an echo in Israel's conscience. Might it be that it finds an echo in our hearts as well! (Ch. 1:12-15).

The result of that revival did not fail to show itself. God Himself encouraged those who decided to follow the path of obedience.

"I am with you," said the Lord (v. 13). Nothing stirs the heart more, gives more courage! The fear of many disappeared and they became aware that the Lord appreciated their total devotion; it was well-pleasing to Him.

A general revival began as the reward of the few: *"and they came and worked at the house of Jehovah of hosts"* (v. 14).

Chapter 2:1-9

Building God's House — With God are Help and Strength

Haggai's prophecy contains four revelations which resulted from the revival mentioned in the first chapter.

In a time of ruin, God encouraged His witnesses by telling them what means of help were available to them. He set the glorious hope before them that He wanted to fill their hearts. In these verses we see a clear resemblance to the Second Epistle to Timothy. As the remnant of Israel, so was Timothy at the point of losing courage and allowing himself to be influenced by the ever-increasing evil around him. The apostle urged him "to rekindle the gift of God" that was in him. His hands must not slacken while building the house of God, no matter how things might look. The apostle added: "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion" (2 Tim. 1:7), and a little later, "Thou therefore, my child, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). So it was then: *"But now be strong, Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land ... fear ye not"* and resume the work (Hag. 2:4-5). While encouraging His people, God did not disguise the ruinous condition, just as in 2 Timothy. To the contrary, He identified it completely:

"Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" (v. 3). One wonders: What did they think when they saw the present condition of the house compared with its previous glory? What remained for this meager remnant? Where was the ark with the tables of the law and the mercy-seat, God's throne between the cherubim? Where were the Urim and the Thummin to seek the Lord's counsel? What had become of the royal house, the nation's link with God? Zerubbabel, son of David, wasn't even allowed to bear the royal title. And what had become of the priesthood? Joshua wore filthy clothes instead of his beautiful robes of glory (Zech. 3:3). How were they to seek God's presence in the midst of the people? Where could the glory be found? The "Ichabod" (gone is the glory) had been announced again. What a humbling contrast between the present condition of the house and its first glory!

We, too, should notice: What a difference between the present condition of the assembly and the way it was in the early days of its existence! Should we lose courage? To the contrary. Begin the work, the Lord says to us. And for those who under His discipline have thoroughly considered their ways, whom His call has awakened, He will repeat this consoling word: "For I am with you" (2:4). Didn't the Lord, at the baptism of John, take His place in the midst of the remnant that the prophet's word had wakened? Will He not do the same in our day? He comes in the midst of the two or three whom His Word has stirred up. Do we lack strength? He has retained His fully! Does He not hold the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars? "Go in this thy strength" He said to Gideon in a time of ruin, just as He had said to Joshua, the son of Nun, in a time of prosperity: "Be strong."

Yes, in Him we possess the strength to work on His house, and to lead those into it who ought to be part of it according to God's thoughts. How much ignorance is found within Christendom! Obviously, many Christians are more intent on winning souls for their church or denomination than on building up the assembly of Christ, the only divine foundation. When one tells them this, they withdraw themselves from their responsibility, claiming that preaching the gospel is the only task given to Christians. They would not speak about deeper things. To be sure, gospel work is very important, but it is not the only task for God's servant. Doubtless, the apostle Paul served much in the gospel, but he did not consider this service to be of higher value than his service in the assembly. For him, both these services had equal value (Col. 1:23-25). Gospel preaching is certainly not all, neither for the Lord, nor for His witnesses. "Christ loved the Assembly, and has delivered Himself up for it." How could the Assembly become a matter of indifference to Him? God is glorified by the labour, however weak, given for the building up of His house, His Assembly here below. One who does not consider this despises what is to the glory of God and robs himself of the blessings of which we will now speak.

New Blessings and Hope

God's approval brought new privileges with it for the obedient remnant. It is the same demonstration of grace as mentioned in 2 Timothy. According to **"the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and My Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not"** (v. 5). Insight into the Word and a true realization of the Holy Spirit's presence cannot be found where God's house is despised or the labour on it has ceased.

God was not satisfied with showering His blessings to the remnant wakened by His word. In addition, He gave it a glorious hope for the future. And so it is today. The hope of the Lord's coming, which we possess today, has become a living reality in the midst of those who acknowledge the Assembly to be the body of Christ. *"Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts"* (vv. 6-9).

The earthly expectation for the Jews is for us, Christians, replaced by a heavenly hope. Upon the Lord's return, He will fill the house, which He has urged us to build, with glory. Through our guilt, that house is still being despised, although He is there with His own, and that ought to be sufficient for us. Yet, when in glory the Assembly will be seen to be God's dwelling place, the degree to which He values that house will shine before all eyes throughout eternity. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3). For sure, the last glory of this house will be greater than the first. Then we will have said our farewells to labour and combat, for "in this place will I give peace." What assurance these promises give to our faith! What reward for faithfulness does God bring to our attention! Let us consider our ways well. Let us ask ourselves why our work has come to a standstill. Let us cease from considering the care for our own interests more important than the care for God's house! Let us awake out of our paralyzing sleep! Then we will discover that God Himself is with us, as are His Word and His Spirit. In expectation of the Lord's coming, we take new courage. He promises us a glory that no cloud whatever can overshadow.

Sanctification and Cleansing Chapter 2:10-23

Practical Holiness

The revelation mentioned in Chapter 1, which was intended to reach the conscience of the remnant is not the only one. In this portion we find another revelation with a similar aim.¹ God had purposely brought the people back to Jerusalem so they might receive Him. Sadly, the time would come when the wicked ones in Israel would crucify the Object of "the desire of the nations," their own Messiah. Israel's candlestick was therefore removed from its place and the people themselves "transported beyond Babylon."

This is the fate of each testimony that has become unfaithful. God does not need us for His testimony. When we despise it, He gives it to others. Didn't He say regarding Israel: "I will give My vineyard to others"?

The first revelation speaks of egoism, the third of *holiness*. Before God we possess in Christ a spotless holiness as well as an untouchable righteousness, because we have become the righteousness of God in Him. Although this holiness and this righteousness are secure, God has called us to experience them practically here below. True separation from all evil, a

¹ Author's note: As we mentioned earlier, the Book of Haggai contains four revelations. The first and third are rebukes, but the second and fourth are encouragements for the future.

living relationship with what is good and fellowship with God, the Father and God the Son is practical holiness. The remnant lacked such holiness. Years later it failed in a far more sorrowful way. The men defiled themselves by taking wives from among the daughters of the Canaanites (Ezra 9); they polluted the Sabbath and desecrated the priesthood (Neh. 13).

In view of this, the prophet put some questions before the priests. First, He asked, *"If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any food — shall it become holy? And the priests answered and said, No"* (Ch. 2:13). With this question he presented, as it were a man bearing holy flesh in his garment as a token of *outward* holiness. Would the fruit of his labour (bread, oil, wine, the products of man's efforts) be sanctified by this? Not at all! The labour must be the *fruit* of holiness if it is to be acceptable to God! God only recognizes work done for Him when it flows from such a fountain. Not one condition of outward holiness, no confession causes our labour to be acceptable before God. This surely is most serious and worthy of one's consideration. Today, professing Christians [i.e., those lacking a living faith — the translator] assume that God does recognize their good, charitable works as if they had value to Him.

Defilement

The prophet asked again: "If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, is it become unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (v. 13). In Israel a dead body was the most complete picture of the terrible results and fruits of sin. If the separation from evil, of sin, is no reality for us, the work that we do cannot possibly be clean and acceptable to God.

It is defiled, unclean. This had to be engraved upon the consciences of the remnant, and so it must be bound upon our hearts as well.

There may be much activity, e.g. grinding wheat, pressing grape juice or olive oil for one's own use. For God it is only the fruit of sin. Only what is presented to Him out of a clean heart, and what is done for Him alone, has value to Him. Such works are to Him as Mary's nard. Filling up one's own pantries is not the work of a witness, whereas filling God's attics and cellars is.

"And Haggai said, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, is it become unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (v. 14).

Our work too is relatively fruitless when done while we are defiled "by a dead body." We, too, have experienced: *"when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the vat to draw out fifty press-measures, there were but twenty"* (v. 16). We say "relatively" because when God is obliged to chastise us, He does so with measure. He is longsuffering, merciful, and filled with goodness. What is the issue of the labour of our hands? From the prophet we learned that we must bring building materials for God's house. Not wood, hay, or stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12). Unfortunately, we see little of this in Christendom today. Many are received in churches and denominations who, though having the name to live, are spiritually dead, because they lack the true life-link with God. This happens because we fail to cause the light we have received to shine out to others. This light is little more than a vague glimmer that is unable to force itself through the closed eyelids of the soul so as to cause it to awake.

Blessing after Conversion

But the chastisement went further. *"I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the work of your hands"* (v. 17).

God even caused the sources of their labour to dry up. The door to blessing was closed.

Had the remnant been converted? *"Ye **turned** not to Me, saith Jehovah" (v. 17).*

Then it follows: "Consider, I pray you, from this day and onward [the French Bible shows this recurring remark as an urge to consider what has passed. Thus: "from what has happened before this day"] (v. 18). Again the Word of God urges us: *"From the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of Jehovah's temple was laid, consider it... from this day will I bless you"* (vv. 18-19). If on this day you consider your past ways and judge them, if you resume the building of this house that you abandoned after the foundations had been laid — through a love of self and worldliness — then from this day I will bless you!

Beloved, let us do the same, let us listen to that call. With a little energy of faith, with a readiness to give up our love of ease and personal interests, with a more sincere separation from the world, with hearts filled with love for Christ, with newfound diligence in building God's house, then, *at that very moment*, we will receive again the lost blessing!

An Immovable Kingdom

In the fourth revelation an encouragement is directed to the small remnant whose conscience was aroused, and who, four years later, did complete the building of the house of the Lord.

This encouragement was a *promise*: "I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride therein; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother" (vv. 21-22; cf. Ch. 2:6 and Heb. 12:26). Everything would be shaken. Why? "That what is not shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:27). The entrance of the Messiah into His glorious temple mentioned in Chapter 2:7 refers to these "*unshakable things*." However, here we learn to our great amazement that it refers to the appointment and sealing of the weak Zerubbabel. "*In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant, saith Jehovah, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee, saith Jehovah of hosts*" (v. 23).

Beyond doubt, in weak measure Zerubbabel, the prince, was a type of Christ. Still, before anything else, he was the representative of the remnant before God, just as Joshua, the high priest, was in Zechariah 3. All things will be shaken to establish this remnant forever. So it is for us.

In quoting Haggai's prophecy, Hebrews says concerning Christians: "Wherefore... receiving a kingdom not to be shaken" (Heb. 12:28). God has already set the Lord Jesus at His right hand and us *in* Him. Yet, soon He will set us *with* Him on the throne. "I... will make thee as a signet." The weak Zerubbabel, just as the weak Assembly of Christ, was to be the signet of all God's ways from days of old. In him (Zerubbabel) and in her (the Assembly) all will see what the Lord desired to do and has accomplished. "At this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! (Num. 23:23). In that day the Lord will "be glorified in his saints, and wondered at in all that have believed" (2 Th. 1:10).

That will be the reward for faithfulness and consecration in His service. But there is much more: God's grace must at last triumph, showing itself to be far above all our unfaithfulness and weaknesses, "For I have chosen thee, saith Jehovah of hosts." The election of grace will shine before all eyes. It is the only, first and last, cause of the eternal blessings of the redeemed!

A glorious encouragement! We possess the promises. Above all, we have Christ in whom all God's promises are yea and amen.

Our hope and assurance of salvation are founded on Christ. Therefore, let us in uninterrupted self-judgment be zealous to complete the work on God's house, by gathering souls around Christ, the only Center of their union and blessing.

The End

Who are we?

—J. van Dijk

A Bit of History

More than ever the question must be raised: Who are we? We call ourselves brethren while refusing any name, for we want to be non-denominational. But on account of the ever-present need for explaining who we are, what we are doing, and the character of our meetings, we have out of what we term "necessity" resorted to referring to ourselves as "Brethren" — with a capital B. At an early stage of our way of gathering, when God gave a real revival in Plymouth, England, others often referred to us as "Plymouth Brethren."

Deterioration

As years went by, many, even among us, made use of this name, although by now it encompasses a great variety of groups. Today a few among us even refer to themselves as: "The Brethren Church." But any such references really deny what our early brethren sought to do, for from the beginning they wanted to be *nothing*. As John the Baptist could not or would not identify himself other than by saying: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the path of the Lord," so we should not identify ourselves other than to say: "We want to walk as God intended the Church to walk." Those who initially gathered in the manner we do wanted to be nothing but Christians.

To Be or Not to Be

The Bible speaks of only one Church with its local expressions referred to as churches. Yet in their character and actions these local churches are to be but the expression of the one Church, the body of Christ, with Christ as its only Head. This consideration alone is a contrast to what is seen today in Christianity, for today there are many "churches," i.e., many denominations, a situation that is not of God. Obviously, that which God intended to be a testimony to His name is now in ruin.

Yet, even today, God sees only one Church, but in that Church He sees men doing their own thing, and the testimony in this world is marred. This was realized by those who, in the early 1800s, began simply to meet as Christians. They asked themselves what to do in the midst of such confusion; could they begin a new "church"? That would merely add one more to the many already there. Could they strive to bring about a reasonable amount of agreement among the many "churches"? This would, at best, join together that which was clearly not of God. What should they do then? All they could do was act simply on the principles found in God's Word for the Church. This would not cause them to *be* anything, they would just be Christians who acted according to the principles of God's Word. It was not a matter of being but of *doing*. Consequently, the adoption of any name at all would in itself be a denial of what they were setting out to do.

The Practice

It is obvious that the Christians who began to gather on that basis had the same flesh, and therefore the same tendencies, as those around them. The fact that they did not initiate a screening process — which would have been totally in conflict with God's Word — but received all true Christians caused their company to contain the same variety of frailties, the same tendencies found in Christianity at large. For, though the first ones to gather in this way did so out of conviction, many joined them only because they recognized the atmosphere of love and affection, not because they really understood why this group gathered in such a distinct manner. These latter tended to introduce human ideas, disregarding the principles of God's Word. This of course was noted by some among them who had come among them out of conviction. Thus the desire arose to stem the tide. In their hearts some began to make distinctions among brethren. Those doing so banded together and in the end became a dictating force exercising a central control and setting up requirements. They forgot, however, that bringing in control is just as much an activity of the flesh as disregarding the principles found in God's Word.

Ever since, among these so-called "Brethren" there have been those who have tended to control matters by legal requirements, as well as those who have tended to take a more open stand. Since conflicts between these distinct attitudes cannot be avoided, many among them have adopted the position that each assembly is independent of, though not indifferent about, the others. Others correctly have maintained that since all local assemblies are but the local expression of the one Church under one Head, assemblies must never be viewed as independent of each other, but rather as interdependent, since all are dependent on the one Head. The Head will not decide in one way in one local assembly and in a different way in another. As long as all are submissive to the one Head — and this is the crucial point as to whether a group of Christians is really gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:46) — they will all speak the same thing. Conflicting decisions in local assemblies are indicative of either one or both no longer being subject to Christ.

Confusion

Among those who gather unto the name of the Lord Jesus alone, teachers often deal with the subject "The Assembly." The fact that they refer to their congregations as "assemblies," and to the sum total of those congregations which express fellowship with each other as "The Assembly," has given rise to confusion. When speaking about the Assembly as found in God's Word, as seen in God's *eye*, one can only display its beauty and blessings — its perfections. Many hearers, however, not sensitive to the distinction, "hear" the speaker expressing the beauties and blessings of all the congregations that walk in fellowship with each other. Sad to say, even some teachers among them have become ensnared by this confusion, as is evident from some publications. We should always remember that, when speaking of the beauties of the Assembly, we are dealing with the Assembly as God sees it, not with the company with whom we fellowship.

Is there no beauty in the latter? Perhaps, but it is marred by what is of man. The relationship with what we find in God's Word and what is practiced by us is best described by a similitude. A children's coloring book may show a beautifully coloured ball that the child may copy on the empty page beside it. You know what happens on that page. If the child's ball looks better than a potato, the child is doing well. So it is with the fellowship to which we belong when we compare it to the Assembly as found in God's Word. Ours is but a poor attempt to bring into practice what God's Word displays. Let us never forget that! We *are* nothing; we only seek in a feeble way to act as God intended His Church to act.

Pretension

As mentioned above, the confounding of what God's Word teaches and the practical demonstration of it has not only been found among learners, but also with some teachers. Though in itself this thinking could be considered a mere error of thought, it evolved into an evil doctrine that equates the practical expression with the truth found in God's Word. It led some to saying: "We are the Assembly; we are the Church". Soon they began to despise Christians who were affiliated with groups not walking with them. On the basis of their pretension, they developed theories why those still attending denominations can never be received to the breaking of bread. Forgetting that brethren began to gather unto the name of the Lord Jesus for the very reason that denominational boundaries hindered true-hearted Christians to fellowship together, they now began to refuse those who did not first separate from the denomination they belonged to. It is true that today many denominations allow doctrinal or moral evil in their midst, but they began to consider *the denominations themselves* to be defiling iniquity rather than just error. They claimed to have Scripture for their position, leaving unanswered the question why God gave such abundant blessing to those who first gathered in this way while no such theories had been adopted.

We too hold denominationalism to be error, but God never declared all error to be evil and defiling. Though in the Old Testament mere error was never declared to be defiling, those who wanted to walk in obedience to God knew they should not practice error and refrained from doing so. So we wish to do, without thereby declaring that we have become special.

Another subject of pretension concerns the question of "the remnant." We are fully convinced that at all times God has had a remnant for Himself, and that He has one today. It is quite another thing, however, to consider oneself to be that remnant. We ought to have learned in this respect from Elijah, who in his moment of weakness spoke of himself as all that was left for God — he considered himself to be "the remnant" (1 Ki. 19:10,14). God had to put him straight. And God will put straight all who consider themselves to be today's remnant. Let it be known that the true remnant will never consider itself to be anything, it just wants to obey God and be nothing; it is satisfied with being unknown (2 Cor. 6:9). God blows on all pretension!

Perhaps the question as to who is Philadelphia ought to be mentioned as well. Doubtless, when God caused brethren to rediscover the truth regarding the Assembly, those who sought to practice this truth displayed in many respects a Philadelphia character. Scripture shows that Laodicea develops out of Philadelphia; we are the offspring of those earlier brethren. It ought to be obvious, then, that we have become Laodicea. Do we not often hear it said that there is much knowledge among "us" (cf. Rev. 3:17)? The truth of the matter is that it is largely on our bookshelves, little in our heads, and even less in our hearts, for if it were in our hearts we would not hear such pretentious remarks as referred to above. Sadly, such remarks are heard among some leaders — too often to be ignored. But thankfully not from all.

A practical example as to where such pretensions can lead is found in the following account. A young girl, who had a good report from faithful Christians, regularly attended meetings, though not yet breaking bread. When the collection came around one day, she gave some of her money to the Lord. A brother, noticing this and knowing that she was not yet breaking bread, went to her, asking: What did you put in? When she answered, he told her to take it out. No doubt the brother felt justified doing so, for I was told this was done on the basis that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah" (Prov. 15:8). Would not the brother's prayer have sanctified the gift (Prov. 15:8)? Was the young girl wicked? It seems a better Scripture to apply here is this: "Whosoever shall be a snare to one of the little ones who believe in Me, it were better for him if a millstone were hung about his neck, and he cast into the sea (Mk. 9:42). It hardly needs to be said that through this event this young girl and her family were effectively hindered from going on in the pattern in which the Lord wanted them to walk. Pretension leads to sectarian or even cult-like attitudes such as described in this account.

Results

These things have their result! Many who have a genuine heart for the Lord sense this attitude and evaluate it for what it is: objectionable, fleshly. In short, they reject it. Several, not knowing where to turn, have left. There are persistent reports

that upon their departure some have been declared by their brethren to be evil, not to be associated with, like the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 or the false teacher in 2 John merely for their no longer attending meetings. Wherever this has occurred it is evident that the spirit of Diotrephes has taken hold of that assembly and that there was good reason for the separation. Sadly, however, many who reject such fleshly attitudes do so in a fleshly way, countering flesh with flesh, rendering themselves incapable of dealing with the evil they encounter.

Now, because of our sad condition, many who have walked with us in the same path not only reject these ungodly attitudes, but also reject the path as it is found in Scripture. Not surprisingly, they tend to resort to solutions from years gone by. They resort to institutionalizing their congregations. They find comfort in organization, in declaring assemblies to be independent, in bringing in ideas found in the denominations and which have there proven to lead to great "blessing" (i.e. numbers). They have seen how those who have said they wanted to stay as close to Scripture as possible have become legalistic and sectarian, and consequently they cast aside the entire idea of staying close to Scripture. Perceiving how such serious misuse has been made of Scripture, many ask: Who knows what Scripture means, anyway? Also, some now advocate that we follow our hearts, forgetting that the heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). Instead of a oneness according Scripture we find those who advocate the ecumenism of the heart — and it seems to work: their numbers grow! But is it of God? We don't think so.

What Now?

What is to be done by those who want to stay close to Scripture but who have recognized their failure? As in all situations in which failure is recognized, the first thing to do is to bow in confession before the Lord. Rather than coming before the Lord with an attitude of: "All that the Lord says we will do!" (cf. Ex. 19:8), we need to come acknowledging our failure, declaring to Him that, Yes we want to do His will, but we have shown ourselves wholly incapable of doing so consistently. We cannot! From this foundation of weakness we can rise up in His strength and once more walk in the path He has shown us in His Word.

Will we then indiscriminately receive all who seek to break bread with us? No, this we cannot do. True, one should not be refused to the breaking of bread *merely* for belonging to one of the denominations. Yet, we need to take account of the person's conscience in the matter. This does not mean that one saying: "I have a good conscience about this or that," will be acceptable. No, it may very well be that we have to say: "Your lack of conscience about this or that shows insensitivity to God's claims, and for that reason we are not at liberty to receive you." However, those who walk carefully with their God and refrain from, and are not in fellowship with evil, such may well be received, regardless of their denominational affiliation. The Lord will teach the honest and upright soul. Those who know that their denomination allows evil to go undisciplined will, on the basis of their association in *that* denomination, first have to separate from it, but such are not to be refused *merely because of their membership in a denomination, but because of their association with evil*. Though, on the basis of our understanding of Scripture, we regard the denominational set up as *error* we cannot walk in; yet, in itself it is not a *defiling iniquity*.

Will we continue to allow in our midst expressions of pretension without dealing with them as we do with other evils? We surely need to seek the Lord's help that we may know how to discipline such excesses. Perhaps our greatest failure has been in that area, for these things make the precious things of the Lord odious to many, and this is a worse evil than a faulty path walked in ignorance. The former defiles, the latter does not.

May the Lord help us to keep our bearings straight, keeping us in the realization that, although the path we seek to walk before the Lord is precious to Him:

We ourselves are nothing!

"The Lord is near!" (Phil. 4:5).

"Already the axe is applied to the root of the trees: every tree therefore not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire" (Mt. 3:10).

"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of My mouth ... I rebuke and discipline as many as I love: be zealous therefore and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear My voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:16, 19-20).

Epilogue

A closing word to our readers who do not walk in fellowship with us.

We apologize for this exercise in self-examination. We hope that it will nevertheless be instructive to you. We wish you to know that there is a path for the Christian walk that is according to God's Word, yet those who seek to walk in it will ever again discover that their own flesh greatly hinders them to walk in what they know is right. We ourselves have nothing to be proud of, and much to be ashamed of. May this, however, not keep you from realizing that what we seek to follow is indeed according to God's Word. If our failure has become a stumbling block to you, we humbly ask your forgiveness. May the Lord be merciful to us if by our practice we have failed to make that which is precious to Him precious to you.

The Impeccable Christ (1)

—S. Hulshizer

Introduction

The following thoughts concerning the impeccability of our Lord Jesus Christ are not presented merely to increase our knowledge so that we may be more conversant on the topic, or able to defend a given position, although this may be a proper activity at times. They are presented with the desire that the believer might be established against the many winds of doctrine, and have a greater appreciation of the person of Christ, which in turn will result in worship and service to Him.

There is a very basic truth that should be understood in order to receive any lasting value from the following remarks, or any other study concerning the Person of Christ. *The primary attack of Satan is not against the believer, but against the Person of Jesus Christ.* This attack has taken many forms down through the ages. Attempts were made to destroy the family line through which the promised Deliverer would come. When unsuccessful, this was followed with direct attempts on the holy Child's life and later against Jesus as an adult. Failing to stop Christ's completion of His redemptive work, Satan now concentrates on casting doubt on the Person of Christ and slandering His Name.

It is therefore evident that any teaching that diminishes the Person of Christ strikes a blow for Satan and threatens the foundation of the faith (1 Cor. 3:11) and the very means by which He is building His Assembly (Mt. 16:15-18). This truth is nowhere more evident than in major cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Science, all of which have as a central doctrine a false teaching concerning the Person of Christ. While we can be confident that Christ will build His Church, this does not relieve us of our responsibility to handle accurately the Word of God.

It is important to realize that false teaching concerning Christ is not confined to cults such as those just mentioned. This teaching may be presented in well-known Christian magazines or other printed material by those generally considered faithful to God's Word. At times it may be presented among the Lord's people by one of His own, who has been deceived or is unaware of his error. Regardless of the means, or motive, any doctrine concerning the Person of Jesus Christ that is contrary to Scripture will, directly or indirectly, lead to further error and must be dealt with. It is the purpose of this study to consider the impeccability of Jesus Christ and more specifically recent teaching which denies this truth. This doctrine of impeccability presents Jesus Christ as truly God and truly Man in mystical union in one person, and that as such He could not *have sinned* during His earthly walk, nor can He sin as a Man in the Glory now.

Kenosis Theory Reviewed

Basically, all errors relating to the union of God and man in the person Jesus Christ revolve around one or more of three points of controversy.

1. The existence of the two natures. He is either presented as man and not God (Ebionism), or as God and not man (Docetism).
2. The completeness of the two natures. Here Christ is presented as a creature, being neither truly God nor man (Arianism), or as God indwelling a creature that is not truly man (Apollinarianism).
3. The *union* of the two natures. Some would present Him as a dual personality (Nestorian-ism), while others would go to the other extreme and teach that in the union of the two natures a third nature was formed that was neither God nor man (Eutychianism).

Unfortunately, errors such as those just reviewed are not limited to the past, but are very prevalent today as well. Perhaps no modern teaching relating to the Person of Christ has caused greater difficulty among the Lord's people than the

doctrine known as the "Kenosis Theory." While not presented under this title, recent teaching presented both on the air and in leading evangelical literature has added fuel to an otherwise smoldering fire.

In summary, the doctrine receives its name from the Greek word *kenosis*, meaning "emptying." It is held from Philippians 2:7 that Christ "emptied" Himself of all of His divine attributes in order to become "truly man." Included in this emptying was His self-consciousness. In other words, the Man Christ Jesus had to learn, sometime during His earthly life, that He was the promised Messiah. The ramifications of such views are many and complex. It can be seen that this doctrine is Nestorian in character, in that Christ's humanity is viewed separately from His Deity. It also fits into the Apollinarian scheme, although to the opposite extreme, in that a diminished God dwells in true humanity. However, for sake of brevity we will only consider the following typical views resulting from the Kenosis doctrine.

1. Christ divested Himself of *His divine attributes* when He took the form of a servant.
2. Christ was human just like us.
3. Christ was the exact counterpart of the first Adam.
4. Christ was tempted just as we are.

The above views will be considered in the same sequence under the following headings:

1. Review of Philippians Chapter 2.
2. Thoughts on Humanity and Deity.
3. The First and Last Adam.
4. Thoughts on Temptation.

To be cont'd

My Joy

—A. E. Bouter

"Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto the God of the gladness of my joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God" (Psalm 43:4).

"My joy." We find this expression about eight times in the Scriptures. This topic provides great encouragement to the believer. When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, the joy of the Lord is our strength, as the remnant in Nehemiah's days experienced (Neh. 8:10). So it will be for the Jewish remnant in the Great Tribulation. Robbed from the true temple service of God through the Antichrist's intervention, and fled from Jerusalem, they will cast themselves completely on the Lord. But this is exactly what we, as Christians, need to do! When we do so, we will experience the Lord's presence, and this is true joy. Jeremiah did this when he spoke about "the city of my joy" (Jer. 49:25), and John the Baptist did so at the time when the people turned their attention to Christ and away from him; but he had heard the voice of the Bridegroom, and his joy was fulfilled (Jn. 3:29).

Before the Lord Jesus departed from this world, He instructed His disciples saying: "I have spoken these things to you that My joy may be in you, and your joy be full" (John 15:11). Wonderful privilege for us as well! Furthermore, in John 17:13, in His prayer to the Father, the Lord said: "Now I come to Thee. And these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in them." Is this not the Lord's desire for us today, so that we can worship Him?

When Paul found himself in difficult circumstances, he found his joy in the Lord, and wrote words of comfort and encouragement to the believers in Corinth. He wanted them to have the same joy he had: "Trusting in you all that my joy is that of you all" (2 Cor. 2:3). Although he was going through severe tribulations, he confirmed his joy (2 Cor. 7:4). What about us today? We are often marked by a lack of real joy. Or we try to give the impression to others that we are happy, but the Lord knows our hearts. Let us, therefore, accept God's dealings with us, the afflictions He allows, so that we may introduce Christ into these difficulties and experience His joy, real joy. Then we may share this with others, just as Paul did in writing to the Philippians from his prison cell in Rome.

Such Things Are Possible!

"This people draw near Me with their mouth,

and with their lips do honour Me,
but [they] have removed their heart far from Me,
and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men."

Isaiah 29:13