

HWMR - THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH , Week 03

The Degradation of the Church— the Principle of Babylon and the Way to Overcome It

Scripture Reading: Rev. 17:1-6; 18:4, 7; Lev. 1:3-4, 9; 6:10-13

- Rev. 17: 1 - 6 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the **great harlot** who sits upon the many waters, With whom the kings of the earth have **committed fornication**, and those who well on the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a **woman** sitting upon a scarlet beast, **full of names of blasphemy**, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup **full of abominations** and the unclean things of her fornication. And on her forehead there was a name written, MYSTERY, **Babylon The Great**, The MOTHER Of The HARLOTS And The ABOMINATIONS Of The EARTH. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And I marveled with great marvel when I saw her.
- Rev. 18: 4, 7 And I heard another voice out of heaven, saying, **Come out of her**, My people, that you do **not participate in her sins** and that you do not receive her plagues; As much as she has **glorified herself** and **lived luxuriously**, as much torment and sorrow give to her; for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow.
- Leviticus 1:3-4 If his offering is a **burnt offering** from the herd, he shall present it, a male without blemish; he shall present it at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, that he may be accepted before Jehovah. And he shall **lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering**, and it shall be accepted for him, to make expiation for him.
- Leviticus 1: 9 But its inward parts and its legs he shall wash with water. Then the priest shall **burn** the whole on the altar, as a **burnt offering**, an offering by fire, a satisfying fragrance to Jehovah.
- Leviticus 6:10-13 And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen trousers he shall put on his flesh; and he shall take up the **ashes** to which the fire has consumed the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. Then he shall take off his garments and **put on other garments** and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it must not go out. And the priest shall **burn wood on it every morning**, and he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it and shall burn the fat of the peace offerings on it. **Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually**; it shall not go out.

I. The principle of Babylon (Heb. *Babel*) is man's endeavor to **build up something from earth to heaven by human ability, by bricks—Gen. 11:1-9:**

- A. **Stone** is **made by God**, whereas **bricks** are **made by man**, being a **human invention**, a human product.
- B. Those who live according to the principle of Babylon do not see that they are limited; rather, they attempt to do the Lord's work by their natural ability with their human effort—cf. 1 Cor. 15:10, 58.
- C. The building of God is not built with man-made bricks and by human labor; it is built with God-created and transformed stones and by the divine work—3:12.

II. The principle of Babylon is **hypocrisy—Rev. 17:4, 6; Matt. 23:25-32; Luke 12:1:**

- A. The significance of Achan's sin was his coveting a beautiful Babylonian garment in his **seeking to improve himself**, to make himself look better, for the sake of appearance—Josh. 7:21.
- B. This was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit—Acts 5:1-11:
 1. They did not love the Lord very much, but they wanted to be looked upon as those who greatly loved the Lord; they were just **pretending**.
 2. They were not willing to offer everything cheerfully to God, but before man they acted as if they had offered all.
- C. Whenever we put on a garment that does not match our actual condition, we are in the principle of Babylon—Matt. 6:1-6; 15:7-8.
- D. Everything done in falsehood to receive glory from man is done in the **principle of the harlot**, not in the **principle of the bride**—John 5:41, 44; 7:18; 12:42-43; 2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Thes. 2:4-6.

III. The principle of Babylon is that of **not considering herself a widow but of glorifying herself and living luxuriously—Rev. 18:7:**

- A. Only those believers who have fallen would consider themselves not to be a widow; in a sense, **the believers in Christ are a widow** in the present age because their Husband, Christ, is absent from them; because our Beloved is not here in the world, our heart is not here—Matt. 9:14-15; Luke 18:3.
- B. **Anything in our living that is in excess is luxury and is in the principle of Babylon**—1 Tim. 6:6-10.

IV. The principle of Babylon is the principle of a harlot—Rev. 17:1-6:

- A. Babylon's purpose is for man to **make a name for himself** and deny God's name—Gen. 11:4:
 1. To denominate the church by taking any name other than our Lord's is spiritual fornication—cf. Rev. 3:8.
 2. The church, as the pure virgin **espoused to Christ**, should have no name other than her Husband's—2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Cor. 1:10.
- B. Babylon means confusion—Gen. 11:6-7:

1. In the church we should not have different kinds of speaking; we should have only **one mind** and **one mouth** under **one ministry** with **one unique teaching** for the one Body—Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2; 1 Tim. 1:3-4.
 2. When we are in our mind, we are in the principle of Babylon; when we are in our spirit, we are in today's Jerusalem, in which there is the divine oneness—John 4:23-24; Eph. 4:3.
 3. We should not dare to have any division, because our Husband is one, and we His wife are also one—Matt. 19:3-9.
- C. With the rebellious people at Babel, there was a scattering—Gen. 11:8:
1. In the ancient time all the Israelites **came together** three times a year at Jerusalem; this was versus the **scattering** at Babel—Deut. 12:5; 16:16:
 - a. It was by this unique place of worship to God, Jerusalem, that the oneness of His people was kept for generations—Psa. 133.
 - b. Jerusalem not only signifies our spirit but also signifies the genuine ground of oneness, the ground of locality—Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11.
 - c. In order to come out of Babylon, we must be “in spirit, on the ground.”
 2. The sin of Jeroboam, who set up another center of worship, is the sin of division caused by one's ambition to have a kingdom, an empire, to satisfy his selfish desire—1 Kings 12:26-33.
- D. Babylon is a **mixture** of the things of God with the things of the idols:
1. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned the house of God in Jerusalem, carried away all the vessels that were in God's house for God's worship, and put them in the temple of his idols in Babylon—2 Chron. 36:6-7; Ezra 1:11.
 2. In the New Testament this mixture is enlarged with the great Babylon—Rev. 17:3-5; cf. 21:18; 22:1.

V. The Lord's call in the book of Revelation is for His people to come out of Babylon, the apostate church, so that they may return to the orthodoxy of the church—18:4-5:

- A. According to God's Word, His children cannot partake of anything that has the character of Babylon—2 Cor. 6:17-18.
- B. God hates the principle of Babylon more than anything else—Rev. 17:5-6; 18:4-5; 19:2
- C. **Anything that is halfway and not absolute is called Babylon:**
1. We need God to enlighten us so that in His light we may judge everything in us that is not absolute toward Him—3:16-19.
 2. Only when we judge ourselves in this way can we confess that we too hate the principle of Babylon—cf. 2:6, 20
 3. By His grace, may the Lord not allow us to seek any glory and honor outside of Christ—John 7:18; 12:26; Phil. 1:19-21a; cf. Exo. 28:2.
 4. The Lord requires that we delight and seek to be one who is absolute, not one who is living in the principle of Babylon.
- D. When God judges the harlot and shatters all her work, and when He casts out all that she is and the principle she represents, voices from heaven will say, “Hallelujah!”—Rev. 19:1-4.

VI. In order to overcome the principle of Babylon, we need to daily take Christ as our burnt offering, which typifies Christ in His living a life that is perfect and absolutely for God and for God's satisfaction and in His being the life that enables God's people to have such a living—Lev. 1:3, 9; John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:29; 14:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:19-20; Phil. 1:19-21a:

- A. By **laying our hands on Christ** as our burnt offering, we are **joined to Him**, and He and we become one; in such a union all our weaknesses, defects, and faults are taken on by Him, and all His virtues become ours; this requires us to exercise our spirit through the **proper prayer** so that we may **be one with Him** in an experiential way—Lev. 1:4.
- B. When we lay our hands on Christ **through prayer**, the life-giving Spirit, who is the very Christ on whom we lay our hands (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6, 17; 4:5), will immediately **move and work within us** to live a life that is a repetition of the life that Christ lived on earth, the life of the burnt offering (cf. Exo. 38:1).
- C. The burnt offering being kept on the hearth of the altar until the morning signifies that a burnt offering should remain in the place of burning through the dark night of this age until the morning, until the Lord Jesus comes again—Lev. 6:9; 2 Pet. 1:19.
- D. The **ashes**, the **result** of the burnt offering, are a sign of God's acceptance of the offering (Lev. 6:10); the priest's putting on linen garments signifies that fineness, purity, and cleanness are needed in handling the ashes; his putting on other garments to carry the ashes outside the camp (v. 11) signifies that the **handling of the ashes** of the burnt offering was done in a **stately manner**.
- E. Ashes indicate the **result** of Christ's death, which **brings us to an end**, that is, to ashes (Gal. 2:20a); the putting of the ashes beside the altar toward the east (Lev. 1:16), the side of the sunrise, is an allusion to resurrection; in relation to the burnt offering, the ashes are not the end, for Christ's death brings in resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5).
- F. God has a **high regard for these ashes**, for eventually the ashes will become the New Jerusalem; **our being reduced to ashes brings us into the transformation** of the Triune God (12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18); in resurrection we as ashes are transformed to become precious materials—gold, pearl, and precious stones—for the building of the New Jerusalem.
- G. *“The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it must not go out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it and shall burn the fat of the peace offerings on it. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out”*—Lev. 6:12-13:
1. The priest's burning wood on the altar every morning signifies the need of the serving one's cooperation with God's desire by adding more fuel to the holy fire to strengthen the burning for the receiving of the burnt offering as God's food; the morning signifies a new start for the burning—vv. 12-13; cf. Luke 12:49-50; Rom. 12:11; 2 Tim. 1:6-7.
 2. The burning of the burnt offering laid a foundation for the sweetness of the peace offering; this indicates that **our offering ourselves to God as a continual burnt offering** (cf. **Rom. 12:1**) should be laid as a foundation for our sweet fellowship with God, signified by the burning of the fat of the peace offering; the burning of both the burnt offering and the peace offering signifies that both our absoluteness for God and our enjoyment of the Triune God are a matter of burning—Lev. 6:12-13.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Of the two women spoken of in Revelation 17:1-3 and 21:9-10, one is called the **great harlot**, and the other is called the **bride**. Revelation 17:1 says, “*And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits upon the many waters.*” Revelation 21:9 says, “*And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.*” Revelation 17:3 says, “*And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman.*” Revelation 21:10 says, “*And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.*” When the Holy Spirit inspired man to write the Scriptures, He purposely used a parallel structure in pointing to these two women so that we would have a clear impression.

Let us first consider the things relating to the **harlot**. The harlot spoken of in Revelation 17 and 18 is **Babylon**, whose deeds are extremely displeasing to God. Why is her conduct such an offense to God? What does Babylon represent and what is the principle of Babylon? Why does God deal with Babylon and why is it necessary to wait until Babylon is judged before the wife of the Lamb appears? May God open our eyes so that we would really see Babylon according to the Scriptures.

The name *Babylon* originates from “Babel.” We remember the story of the tower of Babel in the Bible. The **principle of the tower of Babel** involves the attempt to build up something from earth to reach unto heaven. When men built this tower, they used bricks. There is a basic difference between brick and stone. **Stone is made by God**, and **bricks are made by man**. Bricks are a human invention, a human product. The meaning of Babylon relates to man’s own efforts to build a tower to reach unto heaven. **Babylon represents man’s ability**. It represents a false Christianity, a Christianity which does not allow the Holy Spirit to have authority. It does not seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance; it does all things by human effort. Everything consists of bricks baked by man; everything depends upon man’s action. Those who are according to this principle do not see that they are limited; rather, they attempt to do the Lord’s work by their own natural ability. They do not stand in a position where they are truly able to say, “Lord, if You do not give us grace, we cannot do anything.” They think that man’s ability can suffice for spiritual things. Their intention is to establish something upon the earth that will reach to heaven.

God, however, can never accept this. One man has some talent and thinks that he can preach after he has studied a little theology. What is this? Bricks! Another man who is very clever receives some help and possesses some knowledge and then becomes a Christian worker. Again, what is this? Bricks! A certain man is capable of doing things, so he is asked to come and manage the affairs of the church. What is this? Bricks! All of these things are man’s endeavors to build something from earth to heaven by human ability, by bricks.

Again we must emphasize that there is no place for man in the church. **Heavenly things** can only come from heaven; the can never go to heaven. Man’s difficulty is that he does not see that he is under judgment, nor does he see that he is just dust and clay. Man may build high, but heaven is higher than man’s highest height. No matter how high men may build their tower, they still cannot touch heaven. Heaven is always above man. Though man may climb and build and though he may not fall, he still will not be able to touch heaven. God destroyed man’s plan to build the tower of Babel in order to show man that he is useless in spiritual matters. Man cannot do anything.

There is another incident in the Old Testament which outstandingly manifests this principle. When the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, the first person to commit sin was Achan. What was the sin which Achan committed? He said, “When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle of Shinar...I coveted them and took them” (Josh. 7:21). A Babylonian garment seduced Achan to commit sin. What does this beautiful garment imply? A beautiful garment is worn for the sake of appearance. When one puts on a beautiful garment, it means that he adorns himself to improve his appearance and to add a little luster to himself. Achan’s coveting of the Babylonian garment meant that he was seeking to improve himself, to make himself look better. This was Achan’s sin. Who were the first ones to commit sin in the New Testament, after the church began? The Scriptures reveal that they were Ananias and Sapphira. What was the sin that they committed? They lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not love the Lord very much, but they wanted to be looked upon as those who greatly loved the Lord. They were just pretending. They were not willing to offer everything cheerfully to God. Before man, however, they acted as if they had offered all. This is the Babylonian garment.

The principle of Babylon, therefore, is hypocrisy. There is no reality, yet people act as if there is in order to obtain glory from man. Here is a real danger to God’s children—pretending to be spiritual. There is a great deal of spiritual behavior which is acted out in falsehood. It is put on as a veneer. Many long prayers are counterfeit; many prayerful tones are unreal. There is no reality, but it is made to appear as if there is. This is the principle of Babylon. Whenever we put on a garment which does not match our actual condition, we are in the principle of Babylon.

God’s children do not know how much falsehood they have put on in order to receive glory from man. This is entirely opposite from the attitude of the bride. Everything done in falsehood is done in the principle of the harlot, not in the principle of the bride. It is a great matter for God’s children to be delivered from pretending before man. The principle of Babylon is to pretend in order to receive glory from man. If we set our sight upon man’s glory and man’s position in the church, we are participating in the sin of the Babylonian garment and the sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira. False consecration is sin, and false spirituality is also sin. True worship is in spirit and truthfulness. May God make us true men.

Another condition of Babylon is seen in Revelation 18:7: “For she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am not a widow.” She sits as a queen. She has lost all of her character of being a widow. She has no feeling about the Lord Jesus being killed and crucified on the cross. Rather, she says, “I sit a queen.” She has lost her faithfulness; she has missed her proper goal. This is the principle of Babylon, and this is corrupted Christianity.

Chapter eighteen shows us many other things about Babylon, especially regarding the luxuries she enjoyed. Concerning our attitude toward the inventions of science, we can use many things when we have a need. Just as the apostle Paul spoke of using the world (1 Cor. 7:31), our purpose with these things is simply to use them. However, luxurious enjoyment is another matter. There are some Christians who refuse all luxury and all things which contribute to the enjoyment of the flesh. We are not saying that we should not use certain things at all, but we are saying that anything in excess is luxury. Regardless of whether it is clothing, food, or housing, if it is excessive or beyond our need, it is luxury and in the principle of Babylon. God allows all that we need, but He does not permit things which are beyond our necessity. We should order our living according to the principle of need; then God will bless us. If we live according to our own lust, we are in the principle of Babylon, and God will not bless us.

We have seen that the principle of Babylon is mixing the things of man with the Word of God, and the things of the flesh with the things of the Spirit. It is pretending that something of man is something of God. It is receiving man’s glory to satisfy man’s lust. Therefore, Babylon is mixed and corrupted

Christianity. What should our attitude be toward Babylon? Revelation 18:4 says, "And I heard another voice out of heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that you do not participate in her sins and that you do not receive her plagues." Second Corinthians 6:17-18 also says, "Therefore 'come out from their midst and be separated, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you'; 'and I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me.'" According to God's Word, His children cannot be involved in any matter containing the character of Babylon. God said that we must come out from every situation where man's power is mixed with God's power, where man's ability is mixed with God's work, and where man's opinion is mixed with God's Word. We cannot partake of anything that has the character of Babylon. We have to come out of it. God's children must learn from the depths of their spirit to separate themselves from Babylon and to judge all her actions. If we do this, we will not be condemned together with Babylon.

Babylon had her beginning in the tower of Babel. Day by day Babylon is becoming larger and larger. But God will judge her in the end. Revelation 19:1-4 says, "After these things I heard as it were a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah! The salvation and the glory and the power are of our God. For true and righteous are His judgments; for He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and He avenged the blood of His slaves at her hand. And a second time they said, Hallelujah! And her smoke goes up forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who sits upon the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah!" When God judges the harlot and shatters all her work, and when He casts out all that she is and the principle she represents, voices from heaven will say, "Hallelujah!" In the New Testament, there are very few Hallelujahs, and they are all expressed in this chapter because Babylon, she who adulterated the Word of Christ, has been judged.

The passage in Revelation 18:2-8 tells us the reason for Babylon's fall and judgment. The sinful deeds of Babylon are announced and the consequences of her judgment are set forth. All who are of the same mind with God must say, Hallelujah, for God has judged Babylon. Though the actual judgment is in the future, the spiritual judgment must take place today. The actual judgment will be performed by God in the future, but the spiritual judgment must be made by us today. If God's children bring many unspiritual things into the church, how do we feel about it? Does the fact that we are all God's children and the fact that we should love one another mean that we should not say, Hallelujah, to God's judgment? We must realize that this is not a matter of love, but a matter of God's glory. The principle of Babylon is confusion and uncleanness; therefore, her name is the harlot. The few passages in Revelation which God uses to describe Babylon show us His exceeding hatred toward her. "Those who destroy the earth" in Revelation 11:18 are of this woman, of whom it is written in chapter nineteen that she "corrupted the earth" (v. 2).

God hates the principle of Babylon more than anything else. We must note in His presence how much of our being is still not absolute for Him. Anything which is halfway and not absolute is called Babylon. We need God to enlighten us so that in His light we may judge everything in us which is not absolute toward Him. Only when we judge ourselves in this way can we confess that we too hate the principle of Babylon. By His grace, may the Lord not allow us to seek any glory and honor outside of Christ. The Lord requires that we delight and seek to be one who is absolute, not one who is living in the principle of Babylon. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 34, "The Glorious Church," pp. 100-106)

THE PRINCIPLE OF BABYLON

We have seen that God's intention is to have a universal, corporate vessel to contain Himself, and this vessel will be the New Jerusalem. Thus, the last city named in the Bible is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the ultimate consummation of all God's operation throughout all the generations. But before Jerusalem there is a counterfeit called Babylon. In the Bible, Babel, or Babylon, is first mentioned in Genesis 11, but the name of Jerusalem is not mentioned until much later. *Babel* is the Hebrew word for Babylon. Babel is Babylon. Babylon came first, because the enemy of God, Satan, knows that God's purpose is to have a living city composed of living persons to be a corporate vessel to contain Himself. Thus, the enemy of God tried his best to make a counterfeit, and this counterfeit was the city of Babel.

Man Wanting to Make a Name for Himself

In Genesis 11 with Babel you can see four main points. First, man at that time was trying to do something against God by attempting to make a name for himself (v. 4). That was why man was trying to build up a city with a tower reaching to the heavens. Babylon is good for man to make a name, not for man to call on the name of the Lord. Babylon's purpose is to make a name for man.

Confusion

Second, Babylon means confusion. Of course, you may say that God came in to confuse the people there, to confound them. But you have to realize that this confounding from God was a punishment to man due to his trying to make a name for himself. He confounded them by causing them to have different languages. I speak my language, and you speak yours. I have my opinion, you have your thought, and we all are different; I do not understand you, nor do you understand me. This is a punishment from God.

Christianity is under God's punishment. The denominations do not speak the same thing, nor do they understand one another. The Presbyterians do not understand the Baptists, nor do the Baptists understand the Presbyterians. The Methodists understand the Methodists, but they do not understand the Episcopalians. Each denomination is different from the others. This situation of division and confusion is a punishment from God. The Scriptures reveal that the local churches are not confounded or confused like Babel but are united as one Body. With Babel the second point is confounding, confusion. Those at Babel did not understand one another. This was done by God. He exercised His judgment upon the rebellious human race.

Scattering

The third point with those at Babel is that all of them were scattered. Instead of being gathered, they were scattered. In the local churches we have a gathering, not a scattering. The Bible reveals that God's people always gathered together in Jerusalem. In the ancient time all the Israelites came together three times a year (Deut. 16:16). They had the "togetherness," the gathering. They came together at Jerusalem, but at Babel there was a scattering.

In today's Christianity the first point is that man is going to make a name. The second point is the misunderstanding between all the Christian groups and denominations. The third point is the scattering. Each one goes his own way and direction. Man's attempt to make a name for himself, confusion, and scattering are the significant points with Babel. All these points are still remaining with Christianity because it has become today's Babylon.

A Mixture

The Bible tells us that God chose Jerusalem as the place to put His name and build up His habitation. God told His people that when they got into the good land, they had no right to choose the place in which they would worship Him. They had to go to the place of His choice. He would choose a place out of all their tribes to put His name and to build up His habitation (Deut. 12:5). They all had to come to that unique place to worship the Lord. This was for the

keeping of the oneness. It was by this unique place of worship to God that the oneness of His people was kept for generations. This unique place was Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the house of God was built, and the glory of God filled that house (1 Kings 8:10-11). That was the golden age of the history of the people of Israel.

Later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem. He burned the house of God in Jerusalem, carried away all the vessels in God's house for God's worship, and put them in the temple of his idols in Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6-7). What a contradiction this was. This shows that even in Babylon, there are some of the things related to God. In the temple of idols in Babylon, there are some vessels belonging to God's house. This brings us to the fourth point concerning Babylon: it is a mixture of the things of God with the things of the idols. The vessels used in God's house were in the temple of the idols. In the New Testament this mixture is enlarged. In spirit John saw a vision of the great Babylon (Rev. 17:3-5). Babylon is decorated, gilded, with all the things of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is built with three precious materials: gold, precious stones, and pearls (21:18-21). The great Babylon is gilded with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She gives people the appearance that she is the same as the New Jerusalem, but she is not built in a solid way with these precious things; she is only gilded with these treasures as ornaments for outward display. This is a deception intending to entice people. It is the harlot's false appearance.

The difference between apostate Christendom and the genuine church is that one is a mixture, but the other is pure. In the New Jerusalem there is no mixture. Everything is pure. Revelation 21:18 says the city is pure gold. Also, the river of water of life is bright as crystal (22:1). It is absolutely pure, without mixture.

The description in Revelation 17 says that this evil woman, the evil Babylon, holds a golden cup in her hand. But this golden cup is "full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication" (v. 4). Outwardly it is golden, but inwardly there are evil things. It is a mixture. It has spiritual persons, some precious stones, like Madame Guyon, Father Fenelon, and Brother Lawrence, who give some outward appearance. But inwardly it is full of all kinds of evil. The local churches have to be clear as crystal, with no mixture. Those of us who were in Christianity can testify concerning its hypocrisy and falsehood. Many good things are there to give a good appearance, but when you get into it, you see the evil mixture. We should not be deceived by the outward appearance of Babylon. It has an outward gilding, an outward decoration, but inwardly the situation is different.

THE GREAT HARLOT

Eventually, Babylon is called "the great harlot" (v. 1) and "THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS" (v. 5). Out of her, many harlots were produced. She is the harlot-mother with her harlot-daughters. A harlot is a woman having contact with males without a governing principle. A proper wife is one who keeps the governing principle, which is the principle of one wife for one husband.

One day the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus and tried to argue with Him about the matter of divorce. They told the Lord Jesus that Moses gave them permission to divorce their wives. But the Lord Jesus told them that Moses did this because of their hardness of heart, but it was not so in the beginning (Matt. 19:3-9). What is the recovery? The recovery means to go back to the beginning. You have to go back to Genesis 2 where there was only one wife for one husband. This is the governing principle without any confusion.

A woman with many men has no governing principle. Today she is with this man, and the next day she is with another man. This is confusion. In a sense, a number of Christians are like this. This month they are in a certain denomination. Two months later they will be in another denomination. They travel from denomination to denomination. This is confusion. There is no governing principle. Confusion causes division, and division produces confusion. Division and confusion are very close sisters. They always go together. This is the character of a harlot!

We have to see that there is only one Christ. There is only one church. There is only one Head. There is only one Body! Regardless of where we are, we must be in that unique church. The unique church may be likened to the one moon around the earth. The moon we see in Chicago is the same moon we see in Los Angeles. Just as the one moon appears in different localities, the one church appears in different localities, such as the church in Chicago and the church in Los Angeles. The church is locally and universally one.

According to the New Testament, there should be only one church for one city and one city with only one church (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11). This is the governing principle of one wife with one husband. But the situation today is that of one woman with many men. This woman is Babylon, a harlot without a governing principle. Some people say that we are too narrow. But is it too narrow for a wife to have only one husband? We have to reject the principle of the harlot. A proper wife should always be narrow; she should have only one husband.

Some of you may say that you are meeting with the church because the church is full of life. But later you may decide to leave because you do not like some of the brothers. This is the principle of a harlot. She stays with one man because she likes him. Later, she finds someone she likes more and stays with him. Whether a wife likes her husband or not, he is still her husband. It is her destiny to always be with him. In the same way, whether you like the local church or not, you have no choice.

We need to see that Babylon is confusion out of division. The principle of Babylon is the principle of a harlot. In the eyes of the Lord, today's Christianity is a great harlot. This is not my saying. This is the vision our brother John saw in the book of Revelation. When the Lord Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to call her husband, she said that she had no husband. Then He said that she spoke the truth, because she had had five husbands, and the one she now had was not her husband. This describes a woman who is a harlot (John 4:16-18).

The Lord has opened our eyes, and we have seen the principle of oneness: one Head, one Body; one husband, one wife; one Christ, one church. Wherever we go, wherever we are, there is only one church. In a small village, there is one church; in the biggest city, there is also one church. When we get into the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth, there is still one church! There will be no more confusion, no more division.

We do admit that there are gold, precious stones, and pearls in Christianity. The cup is golden, and there are many vessels from the house of God. But these things are utilized by Babylon to make a show in order to appeal to the real Christians. Today's Christianity appeals to the real Christians by all the outward gilding. But our eyes have to be open to see through the outward appearance to the real situation. We have to see that within the golden cup are many abominations with confusion, division, and idolatry. Babylon is a great mixture.

What shall we do? The Lord's call in the book of Revelation is for His people to come out of her (18:4). In the eyes of God, Babylon is fallen (v. 2). The whole of Christianity today is the great Babylon in the principle of a harlot. We must obey the Lord's call to come out of her. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1972*, vol. 1, "The Living and Practical Way to Enjoy Christ," pp. 209-214)