

The Wine of Babylon

GOD'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD

We learned in the second angel's message of Revelation 14 in the previous study, that its announcement, "Babylon is fallen," is twofold in its application. It speaks of both the literal and the spiritual fall of Babylon. *Babylon* means "confusion," representing primarily the confusion apparent in our world concerning the character of God. This confusion is to come to an end when the everlasting gospel is preached. Jesus says:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

The gospel brings Babylon down; the truth of salvation brings an end to the confusion about God. This is why the announcement of the fall of Babylon follows the proclamation of the everlasting gospel. The fall cannot precede the proclamation. The second angel cannot announce Babylon's fall to come first, for Babylon can only fall but by the power of the gospel. To identify Babylon is one thing, but to bring it down is another altogether. Our only hope for Babylon's fall is the gospel, for in contrast to the gospel's bright beams, the wine of Babylon is left in groping darkness. Let's continue our study of the second angel's message in verse 8 of Revelation 14:

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8).

The second angel presents a sharp contrast to the everlasting gospel, calling our attention to the wine of the wrath of Babylon's fornication, which all nations have drunk. There are three points here to ponder:

- 1) All nations drink—meaning that Babylon's teachings are universal.
- 2) Wine—in prophetic symbolism wine is doctrine or teaching.
- 3) Of her fornication—fornication represents illicit relationships, spiritual idolatry.

Babylon is a universal religious power teaching doctrines that are unfaithful to God, His Word and to the gospel of salvation. The result is spiritual idolatry. If we follow the lead of the second angel, we will see a sharp contrast between the gospel and the basic universal teachings of Babylon that are followed by millions today.

Fear God

The first announcement of the everlasting gospel is "Fear God." To "fear God," we learned, is to be in awe of Him because He has not counted our sins against us (see Psalm 130:4, 5; 147:11). Jesus paid the price for our sins and we have complete forgiveness in Him (see Isaiah 53:6). God longs for us to personally accept this forgiveness by confessing our sins and giving them to Jesus (see 1 John 1:9).

In sharp contrast to this gospel teaching, millions of Christians today are taught that they can earn forgiveness by works. The idea is that indulgences, deeds of charity and self-denial can buy us grace. Purgatory is another option for some of the less faithful. All of these are the means of salvation according to present teachings of the largest Christian church in the world. Consider this recent statement:

"Pope John Paul II announced yesterday that throughout the millennium celebration, penitents who do a charitable deed or give up cigarettes or alcohol for a day may earn an 'indulgence' that will



eliminate time in purgatory. Some liberal Catholics are embarrassed by a practice that seems to offer such a simplistic shortcut to salvation.... Conservative Catholics would find it intolerable that for ecumenical considerations, the church put into the closet a practice affirmed by the Council of Trent” (*National Post*, November 28, 1998).

So, do we fear God or purgatory? Do we stand in awe of God’s mercy or of the flames of purging fire? The doctrine of purgatory and indulgences distorts the atonement of Jesus Christ. If Christ died for all, taking the sins and guilt of everyone to Calvary, then why would anyone who accepts Him as Savior have to spend time in a place called “purgatory” to suffer for any aspect of sin? And if those who do not fully trust Him can pay for some part of their own sins by suffering in such a place, don’t they become their own saviors, at least partially?

Give Glory to Him

To give glory to God means that we are saved entirely by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that there is no creature merit even in our grace-empowered obedience. We are saved by grace through faith and not of works lest any should glory (see Ephesians 2:8, 9). Christ is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption (see 1 Corinthians 1:29-31). Our title and fitness for heaven are found in His righteousness alone, leaving room only for glory to God (see Revelation 7:9, 10).

The opposite of this truth teaches that we can merit grace. The idea is put forth that some part of our eternal salvation is earned through creature merit.

“No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 490).

Can we merit anything needed to attain eternal life? The Bible is very clear that we are saved by grace and not by works. And grace is unmerited favor.

“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works: otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace: otherwise work is no longer work” (Romans 11:6, NKJV).

The Hour of His Judgment

We learned in an earlier study that the truth of the judgment points all people to Jesus as their Advocate and priest in heaven, the defense lawyer for the sinner (see 1 John 2:1, 2). He is the judge of all men, therefore, we should not judge each other (see Romans 14:10-14). We also learned that Jesus is the only mediator and priest between God and man, therefore, we should not look to men for the forgiveness of sins but go directly to God through Christ (see 1 Timothy 2:1-6; Hebrews 7:24-8:2). When we trust in Him for salvation, we have the gift of His righteousness which is our vindication from the accusations of Satan in the judgment (see Isaiah 54:17). While all are judged by their works, none are saved by them. There is an important difference. Our works testify to the genuineness of our faith and belief in the saving grace of Jesus. That is why the very first work considered in the judgment is whether we have believed Jesus (see John 6:29).

However, many are taught that salvation is an issue of bad deeds weighed against good ones, that the gospel teaching of assurance in Christ as our righteousness is dependent upon our performance. It is also taught that there is an earthly priesthood empowered to forgive sins, thus diluting the heavenly work of Christ. This earthly priesthood claims that they alone have the power to forgive, that we cannot go directly to God.

“Rebutting a belief widely shared by Protestants and a growing number of Roman Catholics, Pope John Paul II on Thursday dismissed the ‘widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God’ and exhorted Catholics to

confess more often to their priests” (*Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1984).

All of this distorts the clear teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). The gospel comes not by men or by our works, but by Christ. It is not through images, icons and the sympathy of humans that we receive forgiveness. Jesus Christ is the way, the only way that anyone comes to the Father for salvation. He has always been the way, the Lamb slain from the earth’s foundation. It is not through a statue, or any image, or another mortal sinner; it is directly through Jesus Christ that we find forgiveness. And He will save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him (see Hebrews 7:25). It is His righteousness, not ours, that is both our title and fitness for heaven (see Jeremiah 23:6).

Worship Him

The final aspect of the first angel’s gospel outline is the call to “worship Him.” This call to worship is taken directly from the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11. The Sabbath reminds us of two important truths of the gospel:

1) The Sabbath was instituted in Eden as a reminder of all that God created *for us, without us*. Like the gospel, the Sabbath teaches us to cease from our works and rest in God’s works (see Hebrews 4:1-9; Isaiah 56:1-7). It is a sign of the completed work of re-creation, of freedom from sin’s slavery, of sanctification, of salvation, of rest and of eternal redemption (see also Deuteronomy 5:15; Ezekiel 20:12; Isaiah 66:23).

2) The Sabbath also points to God’s power to re-create us, reminding us that God spoke the world into existence in six literal days (see Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). This power is ready to change our hearts, making us new creatures (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 51:10).

On the other hand, Babylon teaches that God did not create the world in six literal days. It embraces a form of evolution and, therefore, casts doubt on the power of God and the memorial of that power. Consider some recent statements concerning this:

“Did God create mankind in his image as the Bible says or did humans evolve from animals as Darwin theorized nearly 150 years ago? According to Pope John Paul II, evolution may be a better explanation” (*U.S. News and World Report*, November 4, 1996).

evolving—salvation from sin is just a matter of time, not of faith in a Savior. Thus, evolution and the basic teachings of Babylon go hand-in-hand.

So in reality Revelation’s last message is warning the world of a false salvation as opposed to the true salvation. It points us to two distinct teachings of worship. It places truth beside error, God’s way beside man’s way. We have the teachings of the Bible versus the teachings of man, the cup of salvation and the cup of the wine of Babylon.

The book of Revelation offers us two graphic portraits of these opposites in the symbols of two women. These two women clearly contrast the difference

me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication’” (Revelation

Babylon is a universal religious power teaching doctrines that are unfaithful to God, His Word and to the gospel of salvation.

“In his message to a meeting of the Academy of Sciences which had taken the origin of life as its theme, the statement by John Paul reflects the church’s acceptance of evolution....

“The statement is unlikely to influence catholic schools, where evolution has been taught since the 1950’s. Indeed, reading the entire Bible literally has not been a dominant practice among Catholics through much of the 20th century” (*Time*, November 4, 1996).

The Bible says God “spake and it was done, He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9). Part of the wine of Babylon is the idea that we evolved, by definition, that we’re getting better. If we believe the theory of evolution, we don’t really need a Savior, just time. Time in purgatory, time to do penance; we just need time and we can save ourselves. The human race is

between the gospel of salvation and the confusion of Babylon. The first woman is found in Revelation 12:

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1, NKJV).

A woman in the Bible represents a church (see 2 Corinthians 11:2). A pure woman represents God’s church, and a corrupt woman represents an apostate church. The sun here is symbolic of Jesus and His righteousness, which is the only means of salvation (see Malachi 4:2, Isaiah 54:17). God’s church relies 100 percent upon the righteousness of Jesus.

The corrupt woman of Babylon, also called a harlot, is depicted in detail in Revelation chapter 17:

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with

17:1-4 NKJV).

Unlike the woman in white, the woman of Revelation 17 represents a church that has been unfaithful to the Bible and the gospel. This church sits on many waters, which represents peoples, nations, multitudes and tongues (see Revelation 17:15). It is a popular church with many adherents. She also has a strong alliance with the kings of the earth, meaning that she is a church that is very much involved in politics. She is arrayed with gold and other precious stones, indicating wealth. But her teachings, the cup of her wine, cause the inhabitants of the earth to commit fornication. Fornication represents an illicit relationship or unfaithfulness.

“And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINA-

TIONS OF THE EARTH” (Revelation 17:5 NKJV).

Here we find that this church in Revelation 17 is also identified as the *Mother of Harlots*. This indicates that there are daughters, other churches that have come forth from her, the Mother church. These daughters are also described as *harlots* because they have been unfaithful to the Bible. They hold to doctrines based on the authority of their Mother church and not of the heavenly Father. This is especially true concerning the issue of worship. Consider the following statement:

“But since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn’t it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible and not from the church observe Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course, it is inconsistent, but the change was made about fifteen centuries before Protestantism was born. They have continued to observe custom even though it rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains the reminder of the mother church from which non-Catholic sects broke away like a boy running away from his mother but still carrying in his pocket a picture of his mother or a lock of her hair” (Rev. John O’Brien, *The Faith of Millions*, pp. 421, 422).

The teachings of Babylon are not in harmony with the gospel. They confuse the way of salvation and imperil the souls of millions, teaching what the Bible calls “abominations.” One of the foremost abominations described in the Bible is sun worship:

“Then He said to me, ‘Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see *greater abominations* than these. So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord’s house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward

the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were *worshiping the sun* toward the east” (Ezekiel 8:15, 16, NKJV).

This is why the Bible calls us to come out of Babylon. Sunday worship comes from the pagan practice of worshiping the sun and has no Scriptural foundation.

“The sun was a foremost God with Heathenism. The sun has worshippers at this hour in Persia and other lands.... There is in truth something royal, kingly about the sun, making it a fit emblem of Jesus, the sun of justice. Hence the church in these countries would seem to have said, ‘keep that old pagan name, that Sunday, it shall remain consecrated, sanctified,’ and thus the pagan Sunday, dedicated to Balder, became the Christian Sunday sacred to Jesus” (*The Catholic World*, March, 1994, p. 809).

Sun worship undermines the gospel because it draws our attention from what God alone has done for us, to our own works and traditions. It calls us to place more weight on man than on the Word of God. The tradition of Sunday sacredness is the core of the entire system of Babylon. It directs us to look to man and not to God, to trust in man’s word and not in God’s Word, to believe in man’s authority and not in God’s authority, to rest in man’s power and forsake God’s power. Babylon places man where only God should be. God calls us out of this confusion, therefore, and into the clear teachings of the gospel. This call comes forth very loud and clear in Revelation chapter 18:

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the

earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.’ And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’” (Revelation 18:1-4, NKJV).

Let us state clearly: we are not presuming to identify the Papacy as anything other than what they claim themselves to be. Yet, God has His people in Babylon. God has His people in all the various churches and religions of the world. They have been worshipping Him with honest and sincere hearts and He has winked at their ignorance; but now He is calling them to come out—out of confusion (see Acts 17:30). God is making a mighty call for all His people to come out of the confusion that is being taught about Him and His salvation. He loves each and every person. He has given His only begotten Son for the sins of each and every person. He wants none to be lost because they trust in themselves or in man. He wants none to be deceived and lose their love for the truth. Will you respond to God’s last call to the world? Will you take your stand for Jesus and receive His righteousness?

Summary

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died for everyone. He is the Lamb slain from earth’s foundation. Christ has ever been and always will be the only way of salvation in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Calvary’s Christ is the all-sufficient sacrifice for all sin. You can take nothing from Him nor can you add anything to Him. It is Jesus Christ crucified for you. This is the gospel. Amen.



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