

The Iniquity of the Sanctuary and the Fall of Babylon

by Watchman Nee

God's Word shows us that some sins are committed before man, while others are committed before God. Some sins are committed against ordinary laws, while others are iniquities committed against the sanctuary. In short, there are sins committed in our daily life and sins committed in the work. The book of Numbers shows us that the sins of the priests were iniquities committed against the sanctuary. Using today's terminology, they are sins committed in God's work. Most people only commit sins in their daily life, but a worker of the Lord can commit an additional kind of sin. Most sins are common sins, but a worker of the Lord can commit some special sins—sins in God's work. We have to pay special attention to this matter. A sin pertaining to the work may not necessarily involve such things as pride or jealousy. When the flesh is manifested, when the self-will is exposed, and when one speaks rashly or makes suggestions rashly, one often commits the special sin that pertains to the work. Those who do not engage themselves in God's work will not commit the iniquity of the sanctuary. But those who work for the Lord are liable of committing the iniquity of the sanctuary in addition to all the other common sins. Sinning in the work means offending God in His holiness, glory, and sovereignty. In God's work, everything that is incompatible with God's will is a sin and is an iniquity of the sanctuary.

I have often said to others as well as to myself that there are three very important considerations in God's work which we should never forget. First, the initiation of God's work must be according to His will. Second, the advance of God's work must be according to His power, not our own power. Third, the result of God's work must be for His glory. If we fail in any of these three points, we have committed an iniquity against the sanctuary. No work can be initiated by ourselves, no work can be carried out by our own strength, and no work should result in our own glory.

The Initiation of the Work Being of God and Not of Us

In the meetings the sisters have their heads covered with respect to the brothers. This signifies that everyone is covered before Christ. He is the Lord, and only He is the Head. Only He is worthy to be the Lord of all, and only He is worthy to initiate any work. In God's work, no decision should be made through the discussion of two or three brothers. The result and worth of a work, whether or not it is spiritual and pleasing to God, depend not on the amount of work that has been done, but on how much of the work is initiated by ourselves and how much is initiated by God. The less we initiate, the more spiritual, worthwhile, and acceptable it is to God. I thank God that I do not have to initiate anything. He arranges everything. I do not have to be responsible for coming up with anything. We often think that we should do this or that, but God has His own agenda. We do not have to be His counselor. We only need to do His will and find out if something is according to His will. We do not have to worry about the result. The initiation of God's work must be His will and His will alone. We have no right to initiate anything. God's will must be the unique beginning of all His works.

I would like to ask the local responsible brothers a question: In your locality, do you

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embark on a work just because this is what many people want or because it is a logical thing that produces good results? Or do you do it because you know that it is God's will? Brothers, to initiate anything rashly is to commit an iniquity against the sanctuary. In spiritual things there is no ground for your own proposals or directions. God does not need you to be His head. In the book of Job God said to Job, "Who is this who darkens counsel / By words without knowledge?... / I will ask of you, and you shall inform Me" (38:2-3). Every time I read this, I laugh within myself. Man likes to be God's counselor. But God does not hire any counselors. Paul said, "Who has become His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34). I am afraid the co-workers have not been as serious about the work in the sanctuary as they should have been. Perhaps you were quite careful at the beginning, but today you have become quite careless and loose. Those who have a little more authority speak more and dominate more. Those who have just entered the Lord's work may be more careful than those who have been working for eight or ten years.

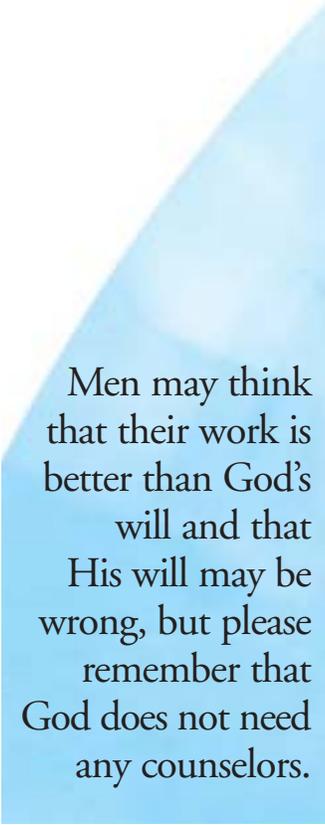
The book of Numbers shows us the distinction between holy things and common things. We should not fall into unholiness through touching something in a common way. Many things are holy and not common. Have you ever baptized someone? The first time you baptized someone, you were probably quite serious. But after five or ten times, it becomes common to you. There is nothing new in the sanctuary. The priests changed the showbread, dressed the lamp, and burned the incense. They did the same things day after day and year after year. But if they were just a little bit careless, they would have committed the iniquity of the sanctuary and died. Therefore, no priest could consider his work a common thing. The first time a worker has to give a message, he is very serious. But after he speaks a few more times, it becomes a common thing to him. Many have said to me, "You seem to be prepared all the time." But I can testify that every time I read the New Testament, I feel as if I have never read it before, and every time I speak, I feel as if it is the first time I have ever spoken. Brothers, we cannot consider any of God's work as a common thing. Whether or not we are fresh to others depends on whether spiritual things are fresh to us.

Take the example of the breaking of bread. The first time we have to bless the bread we are solemnly aware of its significance. We are very careful before the Lord, and we are truly like the priests. Subconsciously, God's power and His Spirit come upon us. But gradually, we become more relaxed. Our spiritual feeling is not as strong as before, and we have little spirit for prayer and worship. A person may realize that God has not given him the power and the anointing at a particular time; however, he may think that since he has done it before, he can do the same thing today. In this way he loses his spiritual freshness and the power of life. There are three results or punishments for the iniquity of the sanctuary. First, there is a loss of the power of life; a man becomes stale. Second, there is the experience of spiritual death; there may even be sicknesses or physical death. God does not allow those who sin this way to continue. Third, there will be the judgment at the judgment seat. I have the deep sense that at the judgment seat no sin will be greater than the iniquity of the sanctuary.

Brothers, we have to take this matter seriously. We cannot initiate the work. A man can only be satisfied when his desires are met. In the same way, God can only be satisfied when His will is fulfilled. We have no other choice than to do God's will. We cannot replace God's will with anything else. All the sacrifices in the world cannot replace God's will. Men may think that their work is better than God's will and that His will may be wrong, but please remember that God does not need any counselors. He only wants us to do His will. We may have done a lot of things for God, but no matter how much we have done, the only thing that counts is God's will.

The Advance of God's Work Being by God's Power and Not Our Power

The advance of God's work can only be carried out by His power. We can only accomplish



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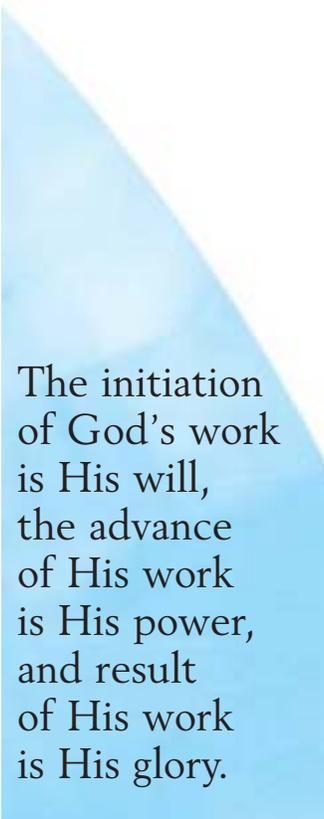
God's will and purpose by means of His power. In order to accomplish God's will, not only must the beginning be of God, the process of carrying it out must also be according to His will. We can never fulfill God's will by our own ability. Once I went to Hong Kong with three hundred dollars in my pocket. I had to cross the harbor from Kowloon to Hong Kong, which cost five cents. I asked a man to give me change, and he said that my money was no good. I showed him the three hundred dollars, but he insisted that my money was useless. He then told me that in Hong Kong only Hong Kong currency is accepted. This is like the Chinese Customs Department which accepts only currency issued by the Chinese Central Bank. The same kind of relationship exists between God's will and His power. It does not matter how much "money" you have in your pocket, you cannot buy anything in God's kingdom with it. Only God's power—God's "money"—will be accepted. Even after a man knows God's will, there is still the danger that he will try to accomplish it by his own power, ideas, charisma, or eloquence. Abraham's begetting of Ishmael is one example. This is where the problem lies. The starting point and final goal of a work may be according to God, but the means and power that a man uses to accomplish His will are of great significance. Every worker of the Lord must check with himself about the means that he uses to accomplish God's will.

The goal of a work must be spiritual. But the method and means by which we reach God's goal must also be spiritual. Otherwise, we will commit the iniquity of the sanctuary by bringing the flesh into the sanctuary. God said, "The stranger who comes near shall be put to death" (Num. 18:7). The accomplishment of God's work has nothing to do with our power. The question is not how much we have done, but whether we have done something according to God's power. A brother said, "Only that which is from heaven can go back to heaven." A sister also said, "If the Lord comes, we can go home." Let me ask whether we will be going home or visiting as a guest when we go to the Lord. The answer lies in whether or not we come from the Lord. If I came from the Lord, my return would be like going home. Otherwise, it would be like a visitation. I cannot say that I am returning to Amoy, because Amoy is not my home. If we are to return to heaven, we must first come from heaven. If a man derives his strength from Adam, he can only return to Adam; he can never return to God. A worker must remember that God's work can only be accomplished by God's power. Otherwise, no work can please God.

The Result of God's Work Being for God's Glory and Not for Our Glory

The initiation of God's work is His will, and the advance of His work is His power. These two things have nothing to do with us. In the same principle, the result of God's work is God's glory, not our glory. After I preached in a place, a brother came to me and said, "Brother Nee, you spoke so well tonight! Are you proud of it?" I did not answer him immediately, because no one had ever asked me such a question before. I thought about it, and asked myself if I was proud of my speaking. Then I answered him, saying, "I have never thought about this question before. Perhaps I am very proud, but I have never thought of it." That evening I learned that as long as we are only for God's will and glory, we will never think of usurping His glory. If we have the thought of usurping His glory, we will surely have a problem with the first and second point.

One thing which may be superfluous can be brought up at this point. Why does God not allow man to be saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9)? What is the purpose of God monopolizing the work of salvation? The purpose is that God wants to have all the glory. The amount of work one does determines the amount of glory he receives. God does not want us to share His glory. Therefore, He does not allow us to do anything. This is why He has chosen the ones who are weak, foolish, and despised by the world for His work. First Corinthians 1:29 says, "So that no flesh may boast before God." God does not wish to see us getting the glory. He can give everything to man. He is even willing to give His Son to man. But He will not give His glory to man. We can only enter into the Lord's glory. We may be very poor and weak, but as soon as we



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render a little help to some brothers and sisters and as soon as we save a few people, we begin to steal God's glory. Stealing His glory is committing the iniquity of the sanctuary. It is very easy for us to commit the sin of stealing the Lord's glory.

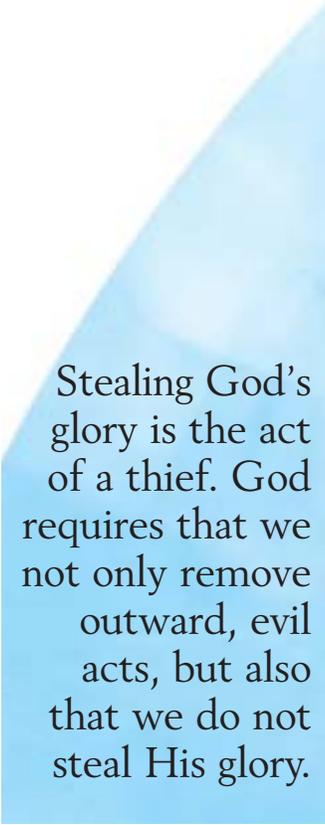
None of us wants to be a thief. However, stealing God's glory is the act of a thief. God requires that we not only remove outward, evil acts, but also that we do not steal His glory. God is the God of all goodness, and we are men of all evil. We can only say that all goodness is found in Him alone. Stealing God's glory is committing the iniquity of the sanctuary. The showbread, lampstand, and incense altar are all Christ. Other than Christ, there is nothing in the sanctuary. God does not want us to have any glory of our own in the sanctuary. If a man enters the Holy of Holies, he should only see the ark, which is Christ, and the cherubim above the ark, which represent God's glory. Everything that we see in the tabernacle is related to God's glory. The temple was filled with God's glory. In it we see only Christ; we do not even see the sacrifices.

The question today is who is qualified to share God's glory. Last year God might have called some brothers to His work. He might have given you the experience of the outpouring of the Spirit, and you might have received the overcoming life. During the past year, I have heard that many have worked for the Lord in a wonderful way, but I am afraid that some will begin to become proud. I am afraid that when some have more spiritual knowledge and experience, they will also increase in spiritual pride. They have not yet seen God's will and glory. Therefore, they still work by themselves and seek their own glory. Please listen to the Bible. It says that God "rejects" (1 Sam. 15:23), and "resists" the proud (1 Pet. 5:5). It is difficult to find stronger words than these in the Bible. The word *reject* means to be finished with someone, whereas *resist* is a word that is used against Satan. There is nothing more abominable in the eyes of God and nothing more evil in His work than pride. We have no ground to stand on other than being in dust and ashes.

In this world, everyone under Satan's deception is a proud person. A proud person does not know himself; those who know themselves will not be deceived. When we come before God, we have to realize that everything we have is unclean. Unless the Lord's blood covers me constantly, I dare not work for Him. In fact, I cannot even be a Christian if I do not have the covering of His blood. What do you have that is not from the Lord's grace? Do you think that you are better than others in any way? Are you holier than others in any way? If God exposed everything within you, you would find out how much uncleanness there is within. During the past few days we talked about the excommunication of a certain brother. Every time we came to God, we came with fear and trembling. Had it not been for the Lord's grace, we would have been worse than our brother is.

We are under God's grace today. We cannot enter into God's glory yet. We have to wait for the time of resurrection before we can obtain God's glory. Today we can only remain humble and useless like Lazarus the beggar, who was always begging under the table. We can only be those who receive and accept grace in true humility before His face.

It is unfortunate that those who partake of God's work can commit the iniquity of the sanctuary. How evil is the sin against the sanctuary! If you read Numbers 18, you will see that the punishment for sins committed in the sanctuary was primarily death. The sin of coming near to the sanctuary results in death (vv. 1-7). The sin against the sanctuary does not need to go through man's judgment; God judges it directly. Those who come near to the sanctuary die immediately; there is no need for the priests to judge it. Ordinary sins must pass through the priests' judgment, but the iniquity of the sanctuary is a direct offense against God, and God judges it directly. Many sins offend God indirectly, but the iniquity of the sanctuary is a direct offense against God. This is because the sanctuary belongs to God and the iniquity of the sanctuary



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is an infringement on God's glory and on God Himself. This is a very serious matter; I can only speak of it under the precious blood. I ask for the Lord's forgiveness, and I also ask for the brothers' forgiveness.

The Fall of Babylon

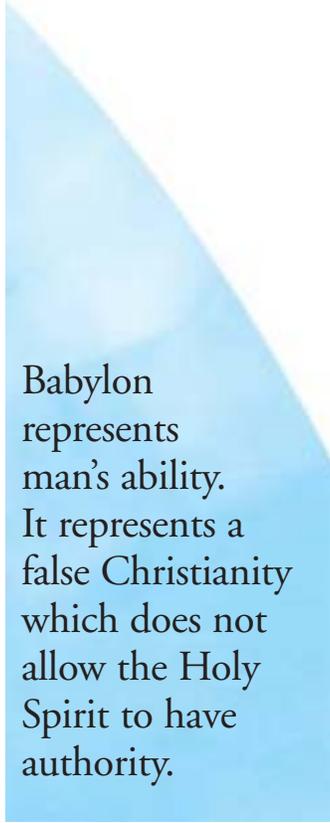
Of the two women spoken of in Revelation 17:1-3 and 21:9-10, one is called the great harlot, and the other is called the bride. Revelation 17:1 says, "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits 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 things of this earth 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



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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.

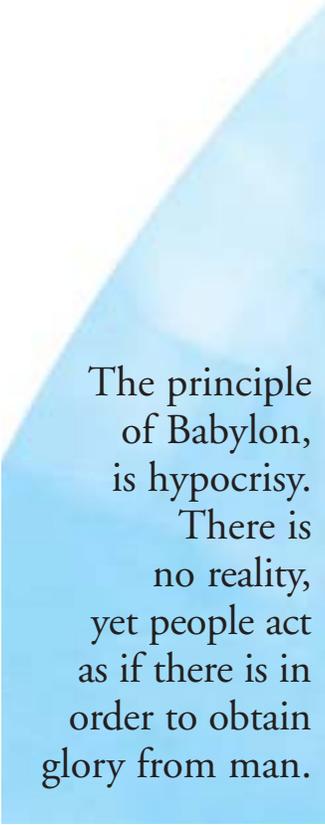
Who were the first ones to commit sin in the New Testament, after the church began? The Scriptures reveal that they were Ananias and Sapphira. What was the sin that they committed? They lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not love the Lord very much, but they wanted to be looked upon as those who greatly 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.



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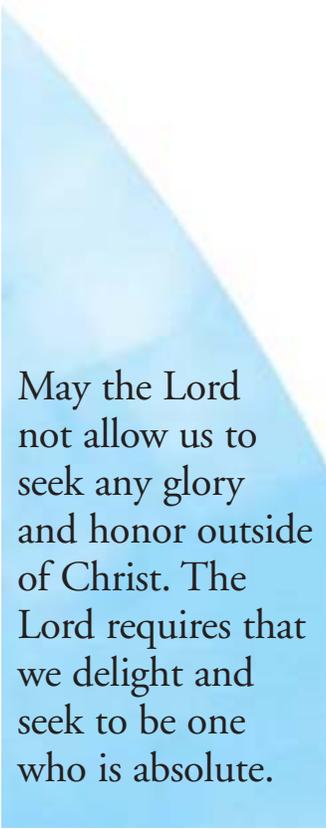
We have seen that the principle of Babylon is mixing the things of man with the Word of God, and the things of the flesh with the things of the Spirit. It is pretending that something of man is something of God. It is receiving man's glory to satisfy man's lust. Therefore, Babylon is mixed and corrupted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



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