

The Great Controversy Series

Sermon 32: A Message Rejected

Satan is not afraid of religions, on the contrary, he uses them very effectively. If people while maintaining their forms of religion but do not have true faithfulness, it works to Satan's advantage.

As an example, the Jews maintained their ancient rites after rejecting Jesus Christ. They vigorously defended their national pride. But the Lord was not among them. Daniel's prophecy so definitely pointed out the time of Christ's coming, it so directly predicted His death that the Jews discouraged the study of the prophecy. Finally the rabbis pronounced a curse on those who tried to calculate the time. In later centuries, the Jews have maintained their impenitence and do not accept the gospel. The results of rejecting light from heaven are terrible.

William Miller did not try to establish a new denomination; he worked for everyone's salvation regardless of their denomination. In general, those converted through his labors joined the various denominations. Thus for a time his works found approval. But in time religious leaders and pastors began to reject the advent doctrine. They did not stop with resisting it from the pulpit but did not permit church members from listening to sermons on the subject or even speaking about it in prayer meetings. Many believers thought that to prevent the word of God from being preached and investigating the prophecies was a matter of conscience. In the summer of 1844 about 50,000 people left their churches.

For years in the American churches, conformity to worldly lifestyles had increased. But in the summer of 1844 even the leaders of these churches themselves noticed the spiritual fall.

At a meeting of the presbytery of Philadelphia, Mr. Barnes, author of a commentary widely used and pastor of one of the leading churches in that city, "stated that he had been in the ministry for twenty years, and never, till the last Communion, had he administered the ordinance without receiving more or less into the church. But now there are no awakenings, no conversions, not much apparent growth in grace in professors, and none come to his study to converse about the salvation of their souls. With the increase of business, and the brightening prospects of commerce and manufacture, there is an increase of worldly-mindedness. Thus it is with all the denominations."--Congregational Journal, May 23, 1844. {GC 376.3}

No matter where people are, if they reject truth, the result is spiritual darkness. Perhaps they do not know the reasons but spiritual darkness does not happen without reason.

Matthew 6:22 The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.²³ "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

In Revelation 14:6-7, while the first angel's message points to a world-wide spiritual awakening, the Lord's purpose was to separate those who claim to be His people from the corrupting influences of the world. If the message had been accepted, it would have caused the believers to abandon the sins and worldly behaviors that were separating them from God. If they had prepared to stand in the Lord's presence by humbling themselves the power of the Holy Spirit would have appeared among them.

But the churches in general did not accept the warning. First of all, the church leaders should have discerned the signs of Jesus' soon coming, they should have understood the prophecies. But worldly ambitions filled their hearts and devotion to God and faith in His word had grown cold. Wherever the advent message was given it awakened their prejudice and unbelief. Because the message was given largely by those who were not clergy, many people came against it. Because they could not refute the time prophecies they maintained that the prophecies were sealed and could not be understood. The church members did not heed the message because they trusted their leaders. The message revealed that their hearts were not bound to Christ, but to the world. Didn't the Jews give the same response when Jesus first came?

When the philosophers came from the east to Jerusalem and said the Christ was born, the scribes and Pharisees were unaware. They did not know the prophecies concerning Christ and they did not expect Him. Worldly ambitions filled their hearts and blinded them. Only foreigners and a handful of shepherds were expecting Christ. When the philosophers asked where Christ was, the Jewish leaders were upset. How could it be that the Lord would give information to foreigners, to non-Jews and not to themselves? Jesus and His disciples were ordinary people. For this reason many people, especially the religious leaders rejected Jesus. People trusted to what their leaders said. Jesus' coming revealed that their hearts were not bound to Christ but to this world.

The rejection of the first angel's message in 1844 caused a spiritual death in the churches.

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

The name Babylon come from the word "Babel" and in Hebrew means confusion. In the Bible, this name represents the various wrong and apostate religions. In the seventeenth chapter of Revelation Babylon is represented as a woman. In the Bible, God's people or His church are sometimes represented as a woman. A virtuous woman represents a pure church, a vile woman represents an apostate church.

Together with this, the Bible sometimes describes God's relation to His people as a marriage.

Jeremiah 3:14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

In the New Testament we have the same concept.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

When the churches turned their affections from Christ by filling their hearts with the pleasures and ambitions of the world, the Bible compares this situation to adultery.

Jeremiah 3:20 Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the LORD.

The Lord was addressing Israel when He said:

Ezekiel 16:15 " But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it.

Thus if God's people are not faithful, the situation is described as harlotry.

In the New Testament we find a similar expression to these.

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Revelation 17:1-6 says:

Revelation 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,² "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.⁶ I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

And with this the 18th verse says:

Revelation 17:18 "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

In Europe for hundreds of years, the power that reigned over the kings of the earth was the Roman Catholic Church. The expression, "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls" vividly describes the Catholic Church's pomp and more than kingly glory. The expression, "drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" well describes the cruel oppression of the followers of Jesus. Babylon has a forbidden relationship with the kings of the earth. As ancient Israel entered into relationship with the heathen and committed adultery, Babylon does the same thing by gaining support from the world.

Babylon is the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. Babylon's daughters represent the churches that conform to her teachings and traditions. These churches, like Rome, sacrifice the truth and God's favor to establish an illicit forbidden alliance with the world. In Revelation 14:8, Babylon is fallen. This means that at one time Babylon was standing and later was corrupted. The message of Babylon's fall is announced after the judgment day has come in the last days. It means that the fall of Babylon happens after the judgment day begins in 1844. So the fall of Babylon in Revelation 14:8 cannot just refer to the Roman Catholic Church because that church many centuries earlier. In the last days there is a call like this:

Revelation 18:4 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."

The Bible says that in the last days, many believers are still in Babylon. Where are the majority of Jesus' followers right now? Without doubt they are in the Protestant churches. When these Protestant churches were formed, they took a noble stand for truth and for God. Most Protestant churches however have followed Rome's example and committed fornication with the kings of the earth. Some of them did this by trying to win the favor of the world and others by forming state churches. The name Babel, that is confusion, can rightly be applied to these churches. All of

them claim that their doctrines come from the Bible yet there are many denominations and they hold different doctrines from one another.

A Roman Catholic work argues that "if the Church of Rome were ever guilty of idolatry in relation to the saints, her daughter, the Church of England, stands guilty of the same, which has ten churches dedicated to Mary for one dedicated to Christ."--Richard Challoner, *The Catholic Christian Instructed*, Preface, pages 21, 22. {GC 384.1}

And Dr. Hopkins, in "A Treatise on the Millennium," declares: "There is no reason to consider the antichristian spirit and practices to be confined to that which is now called the Church of Rome. The Protestant churches have much of antichrist in them, and are far from being wholly reformed from . . . corruptions and wickedness."--Samuel Hopkins, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 328. {GC 384.2}

O.K., so when did the churches initially become corrupted? They conformed to the customs of the heathen in order to win converts from heathenism. They lowered the standard of Christian faith. As the Christian religion gained support from the rulers of the world, many people apparently accepted the faith and joined the church. But in their hearts they were still pagans.

The same thing happened in the Protestant churches. As the founders of the Protestant churches who were faithful to the Lord and had the spirit of reform died off, those who took their places changed the cause. The churches are departing from the humility, self-sacrifice and rejection of the world that was exhibited by the reformers. The first purity is being lost. Yet the church members blindly cling to the creed that was left to them and refuse to accept truth beyond what the first great leader could see.

Babylon "has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." What is the wine of the wrath of her fornication? The churches are accepting false doctrines as a result of their forbidden association with the rulers of the world. Friendship of the world is destroying faith and by presenting doctrines contrary to the most explicit teachings of the Bible, they leave a corrupting influence in the world.

The second angel's message "Babylon is fallen" was announced in the summer of 1844. Mostly, this was true in the United States because that is where the message of the judgment was mostly preached and rejected. The churches in America fell more rapidly. But that message did not reach its complete fulfillment because the prophecy says, "because she has made **all nations** drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." This has not happened yet. The spirit of conformity to the world and indifference to the truth for this time is increasing in the Christian world but it has not reached its peak. Until the churches' union with the world happens in the whole world

Babylon's fall will not be complete. This change is continuing and will happen with the meaning described in Revelation 14:8.

In spite of the spiritual darkness in the churches forming Babylon, most of Christ's true followers are found in her communion. Many people have not seen the special truths for our time. Some are searching for a clearer light. They are concerned as the churches that they belong to are departing from the truth and in the end there will be a separation from them. The true believers will hear this call:

Revelation 18:4 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."