



Sigurd Bratlie

THE BRIDE & THE HARLOT

and the end times

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Translated from the Norwegian
Original title: Bruden og Skjøgen og de siste tider
First published in 1946

English Edition: 5th edition 2007

e-Book version: 2011 (revision: 21-7-2011)
ISBN 978-82-8253-026-2 (ePub format)

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P.O. Box 900
3168 Melsomvik
Norway

www.ssfnnett.no
www.brunstad.org

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible (1982) Scripture references that vary from the NKJV are direct translations from the Norwegian Bible translation used by the author.

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What Is the Harlot?

The harlot is the result of Satan's work among God's people. She is the wolf in sheep's clothing, transforming herself as apostles of Christ. It is difficult for people to believe this, but the apostle Paul tells us, "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." 2 Cor. 11:13-15.

The harlot rides on the beast and at the same time shields it. Rev. 17:3. The harlot is Babylon. Verse 5.

What Is the Bride?

The bride is the result of the work of the Spirit of Christ among men. She is Christ's helper and is comparable to Him. She is the Lamb's wife. Rev. 21:9 and Gen. 2:18. She is one flesh with Christ. Eph. 5:30-32. She is the Church of Christ, the firstfruits of God's creation. Eph. 5:24-27; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4.

The bride is the one who overcomes, and she will sit on thrones together with Jesus. Rev. 3:21. The bride is the New Jerusalem. Rev. 21.

How Do the Harlot and the Bride Come Into Being?

"Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." Rom. 7:1-4.

We—our mind, our spirit—are the woman. The man is the flesh, because we read, "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work . . ." Verse 5. Many are of the opinion that the law is the man; but this cannot be, because the law binds the woman to the man. As long as the man—the flesh—lives, the woman is under the law. She can only be released from the law by the death of the man. Therefore it is written, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by" (i.e., dead to the things that held our minds, our spirits, captive). Verse 6. What was it then that held us captive? It was the man—the flesh—because it was God's judgment over the woman that the man should rule over her. Gen. 3:16. The man is the head of the woman. 1 Cor. 11:3. [\[1\]](#)

There are many women who are tired of their first husband's leadership, and they desire another. If a woman marries another man while her first husband is still alive, she is an adulteress. However, if her first husband should die, she is free from the law so that she will not be an adulteress if she should marry another man.

In the same way, there are many people who are tired of being led by the flesh. Rom. 8:7-8. They desire to be free; they long for the man to die. For them Paul brings a liberating message: "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." Rom. 7:4.

Paul tells us that we are dead to the law by the body of Christ and released from that which held us captive—the flesh, the first man. How can this happen by "the body of Christ"? It is because Jesus had exactly the same flesh as we have. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil . . ." Heb. 2:14.

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by explaining this. He says this is through the gospel of God "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Rom. 1:3-4. Here Paul points out the dual nature of Jesus—according to the flesh and according to the spirit. Notice how he carries this duality through the entire letter to the Romans, particularly in Chapter 8.

Peter says in 1 Peter 3:18, "He . . . being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit." We see here that the first man was put to death by the body of Christ. This is what Paul tells us in Romans 6:6: "Knowing this," (unfortunately, there are not many who know this, and so they continue in bondage to the first man) "that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." This is indeed a gospel—glad tidings—for people who are tired of the first man—the flesh, the old man! Paul continues to make this clear to the Romans and goes on to say, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. . . ." "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." Rom. 8:9 and 12. The first man has been put to death. Christ brought him into death. Therefore we don't owe him anything! Now we are free to marry another without becoming an adulteress. We will receive as our husband the one who has been raised from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, so that we can bear fruit for God.

Jesus says that no man can be His disciple unless he hates even his own life. Luke 14:26. "My own life" is my life under the first man's rule, the rule of the flesh. It is impossible to come to Jesus unless I hate the old man, because if I love them both, I am an adulteress. In this hatred there is an acceptance and agreement with the death of Christ over the first man, and by faith it becomes a reality in me. In other words, without hating my own life, I cannot become a partaker of this death through the body of Christ.

The mind of the flesh is hostile to God. It cannot be obedient to God's law. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Jesus destroyed this enmity on

the cross, and in His flesh He abolished the law. Eph. 2:14-18.

Now we can understand how the harlot comes into being. If we come to Jesus without hating ourselves according to the flesh, our heart is divided. We are adulterous, and James says, "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." James 4:4. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15.

This is how the harlot comes into being. The name "harlot" cannot be attached only to one particular denomination, but let each one take heed that he is not adulterous according to God's Word!

The bride comes into being when we believe in the work of Christ and repent. We come to Him and hate our own life. Thus we receive the Spirit of Christ, and we have the power to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. Paul says such people belong to Christ. Gal. 5:24. They are faithful to the leading of the Spirit, and consequently the bride comes into being.

The Development of the Harlot

All things, the harlot included, need time to develop and mature. The harlot is the result of Satan's work among the people of God. Now we will see how she develops.

Imagine a little flock of people who have been converted. They believe that they have been cleansed in Jesus' blood and that their sins are forgiven. All of them are happy, and there is no discernible difference between them; but then comes the walk—the life. Just because someone has been wholeheartedly converted does not mean that he has victory over all conscious sin, and he is far from having light over everything that is carnal. That is why we read, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:6.

It quickly becomes apparent that the new converts have much to fight against when it concerns habits and temptations, and they suffer many defeats—they still do things that belong to their old life. This is equally true for all of them, but not all of them are equally grieved over their defeats. Some react more superficially than others. We have to assume that all of them have determined to say farewell to the world and to sin and have been wholeheartedly converted. But this does not mean that there is equally "good ground" in all of them. In other words, not all of them have the same good attitude of mind.

Sooner or later the question will confront each one of them: "Isn't it the intention that we should stop sinning?" If it were only the Spirit of God who spoke to them, there would be just one clear answer: "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" Rom. 6:1-2. But as we have already seen, Satan and his servants are also in the picture. Obviously he is not going to say outright that we can live in sin. Not at all! Of course we are called to have victory! But then follow a lot of "ifs," "buts," and explanations: "We must not take this so seriously. It's written that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. We are not under the law but under grace. Jesus has finished the work of salvation. Are we going to help God with our salvation? God sees us through Jesus as if we had never sinned. We must not go back under the law, because we are saved by grace and not by works. We must rest in the finished work," etc.

All this sounds so plausible, just like what Satan said to Jesus. However, there

is a false spirit in it. It has the effect of causing people to take sin lightly. They rest in the finished work of Christ while still doing the will of the first man. Eph. 2:3. The result is a divided heart. This is the harlot. There are many people who take this road because it is so easy. 2 Cor. 2:17.

However, not everyone can be satisfied with such a double life. There are some who have an intense longing for purity and godliness. However, it is difficult for them—even as Jesus and the apostles have so plainly told us that it would be—when they are among so many who are in this harlot spirit. Nevertheless, these few seek until they find; they knock until it is opened to them. They pray until they receive the true answer from the Spirit and until the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon them, so they can bear fruit for God.

Nevertheless, from the beginning the majority prevails, and they gain control of the leadership. Thus Satan manages to reduce the revival to a flock of satisfied people who have the hope of eternal life but whose hearts are in the world. Obvious vices that ruin lives and are offensive even to soulful people are regarded as sin, and they all repent from these. In one sense they can say that God has done great things for them. They can even come as far as the Pharisees (the harlot of those days) who outwardly appeared righteous to men. Matt. 23:28. But if one begins to talk about anger, jealousy, anxiety, arrogance, love of money, respect of persons, etc., the cry goes up like the sound of many waters: "No one can be sinless! We don't want any sinless perfection doctrine here!!!" For such people only the outward appearance means anything, and quite often they debate whether this or that is sin: whether it is sin to smoke or go to the movies if you only watch "good, wholesome films," whether it is sin to wear jewelry, a feather in your hat, or nail polish. From such discussions it is easy to hear that their heart is in the world and its vanity. The usual conclusion of such discussions is that "God is not narrow-minded, that He does not pay attention to such trivialities, and that it doesn't really matter, as long as these things are not in our heart; we must not judge one another for such things."

Yet there are a few seeking souls in this flock who sorrow, suffer, and are dissatisfied. Something just doesn't seem right to them. They feel there must be something more to Christianity, and every once in a while they create a little bit of unrest within this self-satisfied assembly with their sorrow and questioning. However, they are only a few, so they don't count for much; and besides they are only those sentimental, melancholic, ascetic souls (or so they are called) that are not worth bothering about. So things continue in a negative way.

In a flock where there is no victory over the sins already mentioned, there are obviously many difficulties, conflicts, and much confusion; and Satan knows how to deal with that! They read in the Bible about the pattern of the New Testament Church, and so they start organizing the assembly according to the "biblical" pattern. A pastor together with elders, a treasurer, deacons, and other church officials are elected to carry out various duties as needed. This is where Satan plays his trump card so he can have everything the way he wants it. They are all chosen by majority vote, and it is precisely by using the majority that Satan gains his victory. The number of the beast is 666 (see Rev. 13:18), which is two-thirds, and by this majority the beast has instituted his laws and achieved his own will in every organization and group. One thing is certain: the majority has never been God-fearing; it is the few that fear Him. By the number of the beast (or we can say, by the majority) the few who are God-fearing are shut out. "But they voted in the elders in the early church," you may say. No, not at all. If you read carefully, you will see that it was Paul and Barnabas who appointed elders for them (Acts 14:23), and it was Titus and Timothy who were to appoint elders (Tit. 1:5 and 1 Tim. 3).

Once Satan, in God's name, has organized the assembly according to the "biblical" pattern and by means of a carnal majority has placed the "right" people in positions of authority, he can really begin to "Christianize" people. He places the most active, talented, and appealing people in positions of authority, while all the others sit passively in their pews. This is real democracy. Everyone has a say, because those who sit in the pews have elected the leaders who sit on the platform. And those who sit on the platform hold all the reins, but they must please those who sit in the pews or risk being voted out in the next election.

The assembly must have a name, of course, and a nice biblical name is chosen. A church register is set up, with the members duly enrolled. Now it is important to expand—gather more members—because the more they gather, the more power and honor they receive. In the beginning a certain reproach rests over this little group; but, as they are all law-abiding citizens, they soon gain acceptance. Since the first man—the flesh—is still living, and they love both God and the world (which, according to the apostle John, is just not possible, 1 John 2:15), they know very well how to incorporate into their worship services those qualities that are highly esteemed in the eyes of man. As a result, it is possible for virtually anyone to feel comfortable among them. Above all, the rich and talented must not be upset. Now we can begin to see what direction the harlot's development is taking.

No matter how well organized a group may be, we know that people are quite different, and it is difficult for them to get along with each other. The old man cannot deny himself, and so envy and strife begin to flare up. There are several who would like to be in positions of leadership. Soon someone comes along who has received a "new light" in the Bible, which he feels has to be proclaimed. Perhaps he feels that there is too much worldliness among the members, and so he speaks out against it. The leaders try to pacify him in the old traditions, but he does not give in. There are many who side with him, and so he and his followers break away and form a new assembly. They know how to do that by following the example of the assembly they have just left, only they think they can do it much better. Satan has nothing against divisions and strife. Indeed, he has come to cause divisions—as long as he can organize them; and through the majority he gains control in this new group as well.

To begin with, there is much ill will between these two factions, with each side warning against the other, and those who have broken away are branded as false teachers. But the new group, just like the first one, knows how to please people and soon gains acceptance. The public warnings die down, and they begin to respect each other's right to exist. The new viewpoint, having become commonplace, no longer arouses attention. Furthermore, since it did not include the preaching of death to the old man, Satan has nothing against its propagation. Now these two groups begin to meet together occasionally, which they say is a great step toward the fulfillment of Jesus' high priestly prayer, "That they all may be one." When the alliance meeting is over, they all go back to their own groups.

Soon another group is formed, and the same process repeats itself. What the prophet says is significant: "A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan." Ps. 68:15-16. All these factions are one spirit—one mountain—with many peaks, the one higher than the other. This is why the Word speaks of "the harlot and her daughters." Rev. 17:5. This is the result of the work of Satan among God's people.

Nevertheless, I am fully convinced that on the mountain of Bashan there are many sincere and devout souls whose eyes are drawn to Mount Zion. They wonder if there isn't more to be attained than what these various factions can offer them, but they are fooled by all this so-called "biblical order." May the voice from heaven that says, "Come out of her, my people," reach them. Rev. 18:4.

The Development of the Bride

Let us go back to the newly converted flock, to the few who could not go along with this development of the harlot, who on occasion would cause unrest because they sought for victory over sin. They were branded as extremists and disregarded, and yet they could not give up. They were more or less alone at the prayer meetings since the others did not feel a need for such meetings. The others only showed up to hear the big-name speakers where they could sit comfortably and enjoy the nice music and listen to the preacher's sweet words and amusing stories. Then, after having put a little in the collection, they would go home quite satisfied.

In this way these few finally become completely separated and are left to themselves. Of course this is the best thing that could happen. Now they can come together for prayer and read God's Word, and He who said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" is true to His promise. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to *each one* for the profit of all." 1 Cor. 12:7. When they come together, *each one* has something. 1 Cor. 14:26. They begin to practice the doctrine of Christ. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matt. 16:24 (see also 2 John 9). The word of the cross becomes the power of God for salvation to them. 1 Cor. 1:18. And everything that comes from the flesh is judged. The old man is kept on the cross. In this way the Holy Spirit can have His way with them, and the gifts of the Spirit begin to be exercised. One becomes an apostle by the power of the Spirit, another a prophet, some become evangelists, shepherds, or teachers. Eph. 4:11-12. They begin to function as a body, and as they serve each other, they become members of one another.

Because they have forsaken the world, they have no desire to get caught up in the rivalry of the world, and therefore they have no need for a name. The name of their bridegroom is sufficient for them. They are perfectly satisfied simply to be called "Christians." Acts 11:26. They have no need for a membership list either, because they have been baptized by one Spirit into one body. 1 Cor. 12:13. It does not matter whether they are bond or free, Jew or Greek, rich or poor; their names do not need to be recorded with ink, because they are written by the Spirit of the living God on the tablets of flesh of the heart. 2 Cor. 3:3.

Thus they become the church—the body of Christ—of which Christ is the head. Eph. 1:22-23.

Of course, Satan does not leave this flock in peace; even among them there are people weak enough to listen to him. Not only that, but they are too immature to discern that it is Satan in the form of an angel of light. Factions arise because one holds to Apollos, the other to Paul, etc. 1 Cor. 3:4. But praise God! Paul and Apollos are so God-fearing that they do not gather to themselves. They let the light shine in the situation, proving that those who cause such divisions are carnal babes in Christ. Satan was out to destroy, but God turned it all for the best. Thus the church experiences a cleansing. Much that was hidden is revealed, and this leads to a clearer understanding in every area. Perhaps some were offended because Paul did not appreciate their zeal for him, and so they went their way. However, by this the church was cleansed from a burden that had been hidden until now, namely, from some who were willing to defend the first man (the flesh) and who therefore actually belonged in the harlot.

There cannot be more than one church in one place. Therefore we read, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write," etc. Rev. 3:1 and 3:7. There was only one church, and it was named after the city where it was located.

Yes, you say, but there could be so many people that there would not be sufficient room for them in one place. That is possible, but if we believe the Scriptures, there is no danger of that, for strait is the gate and narrow is the way, and there are few who find it. And besides, I have never heard any group complain that they had too many members. Neither have I ever seen people leave a group for this reason alone and gather in some other name. However, it is reasonable that in an area where the friends live miles apart, there could be several meetings of the church on the same evening because it is difficult for them to meet together in one place. Nevertheless, they all constitute *the church* in that locality. When one member suffers, they all suffer; if one member is honored, they all rejoice with him. This is the work of the Spirit of Christ among people. Praise God for such a work and for such a result in an ungodly world!

How Does the Harlot Work?

The work and the development of the harlot go hand in hand. She develops as she works and works as she develops. Now we can consider her work.

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Rev. 14:8; 17:5.

"For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived." Rev. 18:23.

From these verses we see that fornication and sorcery are the works she engages in. We have explained previously what fornication is: dividing your heart between two men. Jesus speaks about forsaking everything and thereby receiving treasures in heaven. The apostles speak of seeking the things above where Christ is seated, and not the things on the earth. Col. 3:1-2. The harlot works to mix earthly things with heavenly things so that people have to give up as little as possible. This, then, is her fornication.

"Having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication." Rev. 17:4. The golden cup is God's Word—the Bible. When she gives the people to drink, she uses the Bible—God's Word. When people receive the cup, naturally they drink with confidence. They do not consider what is in the cup—the spirit that is put into the words. We know that when Satan tempted Jesus, he used God's Word, but not in the Spirit of God. Jesus was not deceived by the golden cup Satan offered Him, but all the nations have drunk of and been deceived by the harlot's golden cup. It is not so uncommon to hear people say, "But they do use God's Word; they read from the Bible!" However, they are unable to discern the spirit in which this is done. This is why we need the apostle John's exhortation: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1. If John could say this in his day, how much more does it apply now?

God's Word divides and separates; it is sharper than any two-edged sword. Heb. 4:12. Notice, though, that many people use God's Word to mix right and wrong together, and one of their standard questions is: "Is this sin?" or, "Can't I still be a Christian even if I do this or that?" They are happy if only they can find a Bible verse that supports what they desire, and this is where the harlot

works energetically to oblige them.

Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world." The harlot's work is to get the world to recognize Jesus' kingdom; and not only that, but to unite the two. She has already made great strides in this. As a matter of fact, her work has come so far that the teachings of Jesus (so-called) have been recognized as the state religion in many countries. The church, which is the body of Christ, has become a state church, and all of Europe has been "Christianized." We are not heathens anymore; all of us are Christians, because we have been baptized and confirmed. How could the harlot accomplish this? It is by her fornication, by using God's Word to combine the two instead of separating them.

Jesus says that we cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are born again. We realize that to be born again means to receive a new life with entirely new interests. Instead of being interested in earthly things, we are interested in heavenly things. Eph. 2:6. But it is not easy to bring people to the point where they are born again. It is a momentous decision in a person's life when he repents and forsakes everything to follow Jesus. The harlot, however, has an answer for this too. She teaches that a person is born again in baptism. All you have to do is be baptized, and then you are born again. But to persuade adults to be baptized is not an easy matter, so she takes them while they are little babies, before they can even think. She teaches that the child is lost unless it is baptized. This is a direct contradiction to Jesus' word: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Who wants a little child to be lost? And so the harlot persuades the parents to have their child baptized, so the child can be "born again" and be a member of the Christian church. At the same time she exhorts the parents and godparents (often ungodly people themselves, who curse and drink until they are drunk) to have the child constantly in their prayers. This is how the harlot has "Christianized" the people even though they do not have a new life or new interests. And the priest can stand behind the pulpit and speak to his "Christian" congregation, leading them in their creed and confession of sins. Once I traveled on a train together with another man, and I asked him if he prayed. His answer was so typical: "The priest does that for me!"

"Because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Rev. 14:8. The harlot's sole interest is to enjoy herself. She does not want the sufferings that are necessary in order to bear fruit. She lives to gratify her feelings. Preachers are regarded as very successful if they can stir their listeners' emotions. Commandments, conditions, obedience, and laboring do not promote good feelings. These preachers say that Jesus has done all this on our behalf, so that we don't have to do anything. The harlot's sole desire is

promises, gifts, and enjoyment. She is like a woman who does not want the bother that comes with children. She only wants to make herself look good and enjoy life. She has truly been given over to a debased mind.

Sorcery

The word "sorcery" is well suited to the harlot's concoctions. Her work is to lead people astray by her sorceries. What is sorcery? It is deception. It is the attempt to bring people to a goal without having to follow those laws that God has ordained for achieving it. This is why rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. 1 Sam. 15:23. People do not want to go the way that God has ordained, yet they want to obtain the same result. By sorcery they can obtain a result instantaneously—they conjure it up. By her sorcery the harlot has deceived all the nations. Let's look at a few examples.

God has given us laws by which we can have a good conscience before Him and all men, but there is a way to it. In the "Lord's Prayer" we read, "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Jesus explains this further when He says, "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7.

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." James 5:16.

"'And if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house.'" Luke 19:8-9.

These verses show us the way: to confess, to forgive everyone, and to put right all that we have done wrong. Generally speaking, the harlot does not protest against this; she simply omits it from her preaching. And then she adds, "As long as you believe in Jesus, His blood will cleanse you from all sin." She preaches so persuasively that you come to believe it and receive a good conscience—but without confessing your sin, bringing your life into the light, making restitution, and forgiving others. Thus you have been bewitched, you have been deceived. You may feel like you have a good conscience, but you haven't gone the way. Your house does not have a foundation, and on the day of

trial it will fall. You must live according to God's Word. Then you build your house on the rock, and then your house will stand.

God has given us laws by which we can become His children. Jesus says, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Matt. 5:44-45. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Rom. 8:14. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." 1 John 2:29.

The way to salvation is simply to be obedient. Our first parents fell because they were disobedient. But now Jesus has become the author of eternal salvation to all those who *obey* Him. Heb. 5:9. The harlot agrees that we should be obedient—to a point. But she neglects preaching it, and she replaces obedience with "faith." Yet Paul had not received apostleship only to lead people to faith. He labored to promote the obedience of faith. Rom. 1:5. This is where the harlot's sorcery becomes clearly evident. She turns faith into something magical, something imaginary. She wants us to believe that it is so, but not to look closely enough to see if it is real. The golden cup, which she has unfailingly and eagerly given the people to drink, is: "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." Rom. 4:5. However, we are not only to drink of the cup, we must also examine the spirit in which it is used. It is wrong to use this scripture to comfort someone who calls himself a Christian but lives in sin. On the other hand, if we say this to an ungodly person who sorrows over his sin and wants to get converted, it is quite appropriate. Now the harlot preaches untiringly that "Jesus has done everything and we can do nothing"; in other words, no obedience. "We shall *only* believe. We are under the blood. God sees us through Jesus as if we had never sinned. Salvation does not depend on us; it was finished nearly 2000 years ago, and I am hidden in Jesus' shadow through faith that He died for me on Calvary, and God does not see me but only Jesus." This is what they say.

However, it is difficult for most people to rest in this kind of faith if nothing positive is happening in their lives, and so they become distressed and troubled. Then they are told that they must not look at themselves, but simply look unto Jesus—a direct contradiction to Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine . . ." 1 Tim. 4:16.

They claim that if you have the right faith, it doesn't matter what kind of life you are living. However, Luther, in his preface to the epistle to the Romans, says, "It is just as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire, or to separate two sides of a leaf." In other words, if you believe, you have works; and if you have no works, you do not believe. This excludes all sorcery. If you believe that Jesus died for you, you will no longer live for yourself, but for Him who died for you and rose again. These are Paul's words. 2 Cor. 5:15.

As far as the harlot is concerned, faith is purely sorcery, something impersonal that does not need to affect our personal life. This becomes very evident in what a bishop relates in his book. He came to an island where the local priest met him and asked what he should do about the storm of controversy that had arisen in the district over the subject of baptism. Since the bishop was there on a pastoral visit, the priest asked him to clarify the issue. This is what the bishop wrote about his pastoral visit:

"As I stood before the cross with rows of children in front of me and the congregation standing in the aisle, in the corners, in the side aisles, and in the gallery, I felt as empty and uneasy as anyone could feel. I did not possess so much as one idea, let alone any plan—not even a point from which to begin. But I had to say something, so I said, 'My children, can these little ones who are to be borne to the baptismal font have faith?' I was very sure that they had the right answer ready from what they had learned at school and from their books. 'No!' came the resounding reply—a great chorus of 'No's.' I could have fallen over backwards!

"'Oh, so you say that little children like these cannot have faith,' I continued. 'All right then, let me ask you another question: can a little baby like this have a bankbook?' Now the children were quite sure of themselves and they virtually roared, 'No!'

"I felt a smile go through my entire being. 'Now I've got you,' I said. 'So a toddler cannot own a bankbook? Let me tell you what I did last Wednesday. I baptized a little baby boy named Idar Bjørn Skog. He has a bankbook. But why did you answer that he and other babies could not have one? Because you believe they are too small. A bankbook is something you get by earning and saving, and a little baby cannot do that. But you forget one thing; we can have a bankbook given to us. And now, you adults who are present: have you and I not asked ourselves many times whether God can really receive an infant who cannot believe? Where is our mistake? We imagine that faith is something that

we ourselves can produce, an achievement that God recognizes and accepts as a foundation upon which He can receive us as His children. Our reasoning tells us that when we are mature enough to believe like that, then being baptized makes sense. But I would not know where to turn if God required some sort of achievement from me as a condition for entering into His kingdom! God is not like that! He gives; He also gives us faith. Surely it is far more difficult to give an adult the gift of God. Adults are much more stubborn and unreliable vessels to receive God's gift than a little infant who is brought to God to be christened, because an adult's mind is filled with opposition and enmity toward God. Nevertheless, He does not reject us. Surely it is not easier for God to give His gift to an adult mind than to this little baby, is it? No, we must learn all over again what faith is before we can speak any further about infant baptism and understand it correctly. Faith is not my personal achievement; faith is God's gift to me in Jesus Christ. And now, children, tell me, do you think we can take little infants to God and baptize them into God's kingdom?'

""Yes,' they replied warmly. It was so quiet in the church that all I did was whisper 'Amen.' It was loud enough, anyway."

So much for the bishop!

Now we must ask the question: Could a little child accept a bankbook and make use of it? If the child cannot accept faith and make use of it, how shall the child benefit from it? But perhaps the godparents are supposed to receive faith and make use of it on behalf of the child, even though they are unsaved and are at their best in the bars playing cards? I believe all these people agree with the Swedish priest who said, "Leave my infant baptism alone! It was the first and last time in my life that God could give me all that He wanted to without me standing in the way."

"No," we are told, "we must not examine these things so carefully and try to reason it all out. We must simply believe that the child is born again by using a few drops of water, making the sign of the cross, and uttering ceremonial recitations." It does not seem to bother them if the child grows up and lives in sin. Many claim that even though they curse and swear, they are not heathens because they have been baptized and confirmed. As long as they receive the sacraments before they die, they will rest securely in their faith. The priests and pastors "bewitch" them into heaven.

Of course, the harlot cannot find support in the Bible for her doctrine on infant baptism. Even the bishop, when he began to explain it, said: "I felt as empty and uneasy as anyone could. I did not possess so much as an idea, let

alone any plan—not even one point from which to begin." Of course it is not easy when you don't even have a single scripture to build on. Nevertheless, even without a scripture, the bishop did manage to turn the children's understanding around to agree with the teachings of his denomination. Even he thought that this was a fortunate turn of events. This incident should open the eyes of all those who are upright to the sorcery that so many preachers of the Word practice.

Without the golden cup, the harlot cannot manage to keep the people drunk for long, so she has to have something to give them, so she reads: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." Luke 18:16.

However, do we read anything about baptism in this passage? It is quite evident from the context that Jesus did not baptize any of them, even though He baptized quite a few adults. John 3:26. But He did bless the children, because of such is the kingdom of God. But some people may reply: "Yes, but the jailer in Acts 16:27-34 was baptized with all his family. Surely his family included small children?" Not at all. We cannot suppose that, since the passage makes it quite clear that this was not the case. Read carefully the whole account again. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to *all* who were in his house. . . . And immediately he and *all* his family were baptized . . . having *believed* in God with *all* his household." (Emphasis added.) Acts 16:27-34. This passage tells us clearly that *all* could hear, and that they *believed*, which they did not do before, and that they were *all* baptized. Read also Acts 8:36-37.

If the harlot had said that baptism was only a blessing, then at least she could have found some support in Jesus' words. However, she teaches that a child is born again in baptism, and she says: "The child is born in sin and iniquity, and when the child is carried to the church, it is a child of the devil; but when it is taken home again it is a child of God"—contrary to Jesus' words that "of such is the kingdom of God." But the harlot holds out the golden cup again and says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." John 3:5. Now I want to ask you, can the flesh of a child be born again and become holy? Doesn't the new birth take place in the mind? Col. 1:21. Is it not evident that a day must come later on after the child has matured, that he needs to be born again? It is evident that the harlot's attempt at conjuring up a new birth with infant baptism fails the test. Jesus says, "The seed is the word of God." Luke 8:11. James says that we are brought forth (born) by the word of truth. James 1:18. In other words, before children can be born again, they must be mature enough to come to faith through the word of truth, just like the

jailer's family did. This agrees with what Paul says: "That He might sanctify and cleanse her [the church] with the washing of water by the word." Eph. 5:25-26. Then we are born by water and the Spirit. Jesus also says, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." John 15:3.

Paul says that when one of the marriage partners is a believer, the children are holy; otherwise they would be unclean. 1 Cor. 7:14. Here we can see the parent's responsibility. Be not deceived by the harlot's sorcery, you who are not a believer. Do not believe that everything is in order just because you have had your child christened. Not at all! Jesus says, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them." This is your responsibility. You must *show* your child the way to Jesus. You don't do that when your child hears you cursing and using foul language, or when you come home drunk, or when the child hears you quarreling with your marriage partner. Perhaps you never encourage your children to go to Sunday School, or never take them with you to a meeting. Perhaps you even refuse to let them go, and yet you think everything is in order because you had them christened? Then you are thoroughly bewitched.

The harlot is afraid of losing the grip she has on people through the sorcery of her infant baptism. Her preachers condemn those who baptize a second time, who reject infant baptism and insist that little children are blessed without having to be baptized. [\[2\]](#)

To all this sorcery belong not only the recitation of formulas and the sign of the cross, but also the vestments. When the priest puts on his vestments, then he becomes a priest; it doesn't matter so much what the man is really like. As long as he is wearing his vestments, whatever he does is holy. The "Lord's Prayer" is far more weighty when he reads it with his vestments on; this also applies when he reads God's Word in general. Here is a quote from the 8th article of the Articles of Confession of the Norwegian Lutheran Church:

What Is the Church?

"Knowing that the church is in fact and in truth the assembly of the saints and of the believers, it is nevertheless permitted—seeing that in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mixed up with them—for them to take the sacraments, even though they are administered by evil people, according to the word of Christ: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat,' etc. Matt. 23:2. Therefore the sacraments and the Word are effective on the basis of Jesus' command, and that He instituted them, even though they are administered by

evil people."

They condemn the Donatists and others, who taught that it was not permitted to make use of an evil person's ministry in the church, and who maintained that the evil person's ministry was useless and ineffective.

How different this is from God's Word, which says, "But to the wicked God says: 'What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth?'" Ps. 50:16.

They are like those to whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:25: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence."

We have to agree with Luther, when he writes in his pastoral letter to the mayor, town councilors, and parishioners of Bohemian Prague:

"To begin with, we must regard as an unshakable truth that in the new covenant no man can become a priest by virtue of an outward anointing. So, if there are those who purport to be such, we can be sure that they are not the genuine article but are mock priests of idolatry. They have no scriptural example to point to in support of their claim; their own life certainly does not legitimize their 'anointing,' nor is there one word in the Gospels or the Epistles that does. On the contrary, this entire system of things originated and was made the standard practice by pure human invention, just like the idolatry of Jeroboam in Israel. To become a priest in the New Testament sense of the word, one must be born as such, and not made; created, and not ordained to it by man. However, this birth is not according to the flesh, but by water and the Spirit and comes about in the washing of regeneration, which is why all Christians as a whole are priests, and all priests are Christians. And cursed be the thought, we can say, that a priest is anything more than a Christian! Such claims oppose God's Word and are based solely on the doctrines of men, traditional ordinances, or on the opinion of the masses. If anyone, for any of these reasons, should institute articles of faith, it would be an abomination—yes, even blasphemy (which I have pointed out elsewhere).

"We therefore draw the following conclusions: If Christ has become the first priest of the new covenant without rank, outward anointing, or priestly signs, and without the bishop's ordination and monkey business, then it is equally true that He has made His apostles and disciples priests without all this tomfoolery, which is why this absurd custom is utterly superfluous. Even where it is practiced, it is utterly incapable of making anyone a priest. Otherwise one would be obligated to say that neither Christ nor His apostles have ever been

priests."

Luther discovered that attacking sorcery was an unpleasant task. People do not like the naked truth, because they feel exposed by it.

The great harlot is not the only one who knows all these tricks; her daughters know them too. In fact, all those who divide their hearts between God and the world practice sorcery. So that we shall not be deceived by these tricks Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." We cannot recognize them by their outward appearance, because they come in sheep's clothing. What is this sheep's clothing? It is the so-called "right doctrine." The scribes sat in Moses' seat, but their life and teaching did not agree. Yet who dared to say anything when they sat in the seat of Moses? They were only teaching what was approved and accepted, and in that respect they had the "right faith." It is the same today. If you only preach what is accepted as correct doctrine, you will be approved. Then you have the right clothing, and no one will dare to think that underneath your clothing lurks a ravenous wolf who speaks so charmingly. Watch and you will see that they are constantly arguing about points of doctrine—about the clothing—but they do not want to talk about the life—the fruits. For those who are not entirely bewitched, it is disgusting and repulsive to listen to two people sitting and arguing about points of doctrine, while they smoke their cigars or have a bad conscience because they have cheated on their income taxes; or perhaps they have knowingly underpaid their house servants, owe money to the merchants, have backbitten their neighbors, or live an immoral life. If anyone dares to comment on their lives, they only draw their sheep's clothing more tightly around themselves and say, "It is written: 'Judge not, that you be not judged.'" And so they save the wolf—for the time being, at least.

When two men who are bound by the love of money sit and argue about whether infant or adult baptism is right, there is nothing else to say to them except, "Repent of your harlotry!"

Jesus calls the false prophet a wolf in sheep's clothing. An ungodly person who has God's laws on his lips, who confesses one thing and lives a different life, is a false prophet. We must beware of such people. The apostle expressed it like this: "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them." Heb. 13:9.

If the food—the doctrine—I serve to others has not profited me (that is, changed my life), the others should not accept it. It lacks the grace that is able

to strengthen hearts. Listen to how grace works: It "teach[es] us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." Tit. 2:11-12. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Rom. 6:14. This is the true gospel, a message of glad tidings to anyone who has a desire to have his life transformed. This is anything but sorcery.

In order to remain undetected in their sheep's clothing, the false prophets always reply with the old refrains, "Don't look at me, just look at Jesus. We must not judge one another." What do the true prophets say? "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Phil. 3:17. "Therefore I urge you, imitate me." 1 Cor. 4:16. If someone were to say that today, he would be regarded as a proud, false teacher. But if we said, "Don't look at me, look at Jesus," we would be considered humble, someone who has the right doctrine. The harlot has truly bewitched all the people. How true the word of the prophet is: "Behold, the false pen of the scribes had made it [God's law] into a lie." (Norw.). Jer. 8:8. "And the children of Israel covered the Lord their God with words that were not right." 2 Kings 17:9 (Norw.).

From the above, we see that there are three key words the harlot uses in her sorcery. With them she gets out of every tight spot and fulfills all the promises. These three words are:

Faith—Grace—the Blood

Who dares to attack these words? For by them we are Jesus' friends without doing what He commands us. John 15:14.

We are in Him without walking as He walked. 1 John 2:6.

We are children of God without being led by the Spirit. Rom. 8:14.

We are Jesus' bride without following the Lamb wherever He goes. Rev. 14:4-5.

We receive a bridal garment without having righteous deeds. Rev. 19:8.

We inherit with Jesus without suffering with Him. Rom. 8:17.

We are allowed to live with Jesus without dying with Him. 2 Tim. 2:11.

We are kings and will sit on His throne without overcoming as He overcame. Rev. 3:21, etc.

How can they do all this by using these three words? They do it by substituting *faith* for *obedience*—which is works. "Faith" is something magical that gives them the power to imagine things, and "grace" and "the blood" are words that are used to cover up reality. "Grace" is used to replace a godly life; thus they come under the judgment, "Ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness." Jude 4. However, as we read previously, grace is help to live a godly life. Heb. 4:16. "The blood" is used to cover up sin instead of cleansing it away. That is why they like to sing, "Under the blood, under the blood." "But," you say, "they do regard the blood as a means of cleansing." Yes, but only in the sense that it does not matter how much you sin, because you are always in the cleansing flow of the blood, and therefore always clean. This is not the way Peter understood it when he said, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet. 1:17-19. In other words, the blood is not something to be misused; you must walk in fear!

Babylon

"Your merchants were the great men of the earth." Rev. 18:23.

Commerce is one of the harlot's methods of working. In this verse her workers are described as merchants. This is the harlot's way of spreading God's kingdom on earth. We are well aware of the crude and manifest deceit of the Catholics: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Businessmen only think in terms of their own personal advantage and financial gain.

The truth is the narrow way, and it is hard to bear. You do not gather many followers, nor can you count on much financial gain by speaking about the narrow way. If you want any financial gain, you have to turn the gospel into a lie. We have already seen how this is done, and there are hundreds of preachers who travel around and offer heaven at the cheapest price. The important thing for them is to gain followers—customers. They do not do as Jesus did when some came and wanted to follow Him. He showed them the "eye of the needle" and pointed them to the narrow gate. "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go!" Notice how Jesus confronts them with the eye of the needle. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Matt. 8:19-20.

Another said, "Let me go first and bury my father." Then came the eye of the needle. "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead." "And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.'" But Jesus replied, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

"Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Jesus was not seeking financial gain from them; therefore He could speak like that. He was not eager to win followers who were financially well-off. Not at all! He said, "Give [it] to the poor . . . and come, follow Me." We can see that Jesus was not a businessman.

The minister's salary is a great problem in denominational assemblies, and it is important to agree on an amount. "How much will I get for preaching the

gospel? What will my salary be? I used to earn well in times of revival! How are we going to get money in the collection? Let us try and get *him* to speak here for a while, because he draws large crowds that bring in the money we need just now, because the treasury is just about empty! No, we cannot afford to invite him, because he charges a minimum of . . . for each meeting," etc.

Those who are not entirely bewitched and who have even the slightest insight into the internal affairs of the various assemblies must conclude that the whole thing is just business. When they want to print special Christmas, Easter, or Pentecost issues of their magazines, they use advertising tricks that we recognize as coming from the world. They are well illustrated, have an attractive cover, and the contents are light and entertaining. You can hear that the advertisements cater to the first man—the flesh. "This is good business, an appealing and profitable publication!"

"Babylon the Great" is truly a fitting name for the harlot. She is compared to a merchant city. Her merchants were great men on this earth. How many preachers there are who have become great in this world! The Pope in Rome is evidence that defies all contradiction. And look at her daughters. The higher up you are in the denominational hierarchy, the more of this world's glory you will receive. You become a man with status and prestige. You are on familiar terms with the rich in this world, and you gain influence. You gain the ear of the local politicians, as well as those on the national scene. There is no aroma of death coming from you that would make them feel uncomfortable. 2 Cor. 2:15-16.

Even in Paul's time he could say that the *many* were corrupting God's Word for personal gain. But the people are drunk—drunk with the wine of the harlot's fornication. They are bewitched because all this activity is supposedly carried on in Jesus' name and for spreading God's kingdom. "Shame on you for writing such things about religious work! All you do is judge!" This is the cry we hear from the drunk and bewitched. They want none of Daniel's light, searching into their relationships and affairs while their business is so profitable.

"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." Rev. 17:6.

Many have had to lay down their lives in the battle against all this witchcraft, and there will doubtless be many more martyrs in the future. Rev. 6:9-11. The harlot's first murder victim was Abel. Cain also brought an offering, but he

was earthly, and Abel's offering judged his sacrifice. "Repent!" "No, I would rather kill Abel." This is how the harlot began to drink the blood of the saints. She has continued to do this relentlessly down through the ages.

You who read this and are beginning to resent the light of Abel's sacrifice, you too are beginning to shout with the masses, "Away with Him!" I would like to give you a warning: Wake up from your bewitched state and acknowledge the truth, and it will set you free. Think this over! It is not the work of the bride that falls under this judgment, but the work of the harlot. If you defend it, your end will be terrible! Rev. 18:21. "But there is also some good there," you say. Of course there is, because in all this sorcery, good and evil are mixed together. The very essence of the harlot's work is to mix good and evil, pure and impure, holy and unholy, flesh and spirit, heaven and earth. "Therefore thus says the Lord: . . . 'If you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth.'" Jer. 15:19. "And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." Ezek. 44:23.

Do not be afraid of God's Word that divides and separates. Go out from the harlot!

How Does the Bride Work?

The bride's work and development go hand in hand, just as the harlot's do. She develops as she works, and works as she develops. Earlier, when we saw how the harlot works, we also saw indirectly how the bride works. Just as we have seen that adultery is the work of the harlot, so faithfulness is the work of the bride.

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simple faithfulness that is in Christ." 2 Cor. 11:3. This Scripture passage makes it clear that faithfulness is the same as obedience, and we should fear lest we depart from that simple faithfulness, or obedience, that makes no excuses. This relationship of obedience is something that the harlot can never attain with her many men. All she wants to do is enjoy herself and receive gifts and have advantages. Paul's mission was not only to bring about faith, but the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. Rom. 1:5. The Romans had become obedient to such an extent that it had become known to all. Rom. 16:19.

Instead of sharing her affections with several and making a mixture of things, the work of the bride is to separate, cleanse, forsake everything, and be faithful to the One who has chosen her. She also has the golden cup, God's Word. But consider the wine, the old, clarified wine that is in the cup—the spirit that accompanies the Word: "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. . . . Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." James 4:4-9.

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? . . . Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? . . . Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'" 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

"Full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead

works to serve the living God?" Heb. 9:14.

"So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 5:21.

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 2:1.

Having drunk wine like that, it is not fitting to say, "Surely this isn't sin, is it? Aren't we allowed to do anything? Is it really necessary to be so fussy?" No, it is more appropriate to say, "Is there more from which I can be cleansed? Give me more light! Let me know your will, O Jesus!" This is how the bride works.

It is significant that the work of the bride is to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. Matt. 28:18-20. The work of getting people to become disciples is extremely difficult. This is where we come to the "eye of the needle." It is a difficult enough work to lead people to the forgiveness of sins, but most people who have received forgiveness are still a long way from becoming disciples. In fact, most of them never do become disciples. Listen to what Jesus says: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26. "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." Verse 33.

Here we can see that being a disciple of Jesus is the same as dying. It means to forsake your family, all your possessions, and even your own life. Jesus died for us so we could have our sins forgiven, but we have to die with Him to be His disciples. Therefore Jesus says that we should make disciples, baptizing them, and baptism is a burial. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. 6:3-4.

Unfortunately, there are not many who know this. When they get baptized, they make a big show of it and call it "going all the way with Jesus." However, when they come up out of the water, they live the same life as they did before. No, baptism is not "going all the way with Jesus." It means death to myself and all that is mine; it is the strait gate, the signing of a contract of apprenticeship, and afterwards comes the way: "Teaching them to *observe all things that I have commanded you.*" (Emphasis added). This is the narrow way.

The first world perished by water, but the present world is reserved for fire. 2 Pet. 3:6-7. "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 3:21.

The first world is the world I lived in according to the leading of the first man—the flesh. It is the visible things, the things of this earth. Baptism is a symbol, a covenant confirming the fact that the first man and his world are dead and buried. "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Col. 2:11-12.

This is what happens in baptism when we immerse a person in the water. Then he enters into the death of a disciple. But now the question is how will it go with him when he is raised up from the water. We might be tempted to think that it would be best to keep him under the water, for then we would be safe from him. However, Paul says that we raise him up again by faith in the power of God who raised up Jesus from the dead. Therefore Paul continues and exhorts the Colossians: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Col. 3:1-2.

We see from the above that there is no wine of adultery in this golden cup—the heart is not divided. Yet there is something significant about the way the harlot baptizes. She sprinkles three handfuls of water on the baby's forehead. This is a true illustration of the fact that she gives up no more of the world and of her own life than this amount of water covers the body.

But then you may ask: "Don't you feel anything of the old life after you have been baptized, or buried?" It is evident that many who have been baptized continue to live the old life. However, we must remember that baptism is a covenant with your conscience, and that not everyone who makes a covenant keeps it. We need to remember that the first world perished by water, whereas the present world is reserved for fire. This also applies to us. "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed." Our old man, which is our will to sin and to do everything we know to be sin, was crucified, or buried. But when we come up out of the water, we bring with us our body of sin—unconscious sin—the desires and passions in the flesh. This is where the fire is meant to do its work. Peter says, "Repent, and let every one of you be

baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38; 19:5-6.

In these verses we see that when they were baptized, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit. The offering was laid on the altar by baptism (indicating the death of the disciple), and God could now answer with fire. "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" Luke 12:49. And John the Baptist says, "He who is coming after me . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Matt. 3:11. The fire is to destroy the body of sin. There are many who have been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit; but when the fire begins to do its work, they draw back and are not faithful to keep their covenant, so the Spirit leaves them. That is why many of those who were baptized with the Spirit are now wandering around forsaken by the Spirit and living according to their lusts.

The bride has an immense work to lead people to the obedience of the faith, for when she has made a disciple, she must also teach him to obey everything Jesus has commanded.

Paul writes about this to the Colossians in Chapter 3:3: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." We have died; that is the covenant. We hate our own life, and death is contained in this hate. But has it become reality yet? No, it becomes reality gradually as we continue to live. Paul explains it further in verse 5: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." For this we need the Holy Spirit and fire. Therefore the promise was that they should receive the Holy Spirit after they had been baptized.

This is the way Jesus went before us. Walking on a way to get to the goal is the opposite of conjuring yourself to the goal. You cannot be Jesus' friend unless you do what He commands. You cannot say that you are in Him unless you walk as He walked. You will not be cleansed from your sin unless you walk in the light. You are not a child of God unless you are led by the Spirit. You are not of the bride unless you follow the Lamb wherever He goes. You will not receive a bridal garment unless your deeds are holy and righteous. You will not inherit together with Jesus unless you suffer with Him. You will not live with Him unless you have died with Him. Etc.

Just as the harlot has three words for her sorcery—faith, grace, and the blood—so the bride uses these three words, not to bewitch people but to help them go the way. She does not use "faith" instead of obedience—as something imaginary. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of

things not seen By faith we understand." Heb. 11:1-3. Then we read further how these heroes were obedient by faith and went the way, thus obtaining the promises.

The harlot wants to be justified without works, just like Abraham. Rom. 4:3. But she does not want to offer up her Isaac as Abraham did, so she can be justified by works as he was. James 2:21. The faith of the bride, in contrast to that of the harlot, is active through her works, and her faith is made perfect by her works. Verse 22. "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" Verse 20.

In other words, faith is the hand by which we receive from God everything we need for life and godliness. By faith the Scriptures become living for me. By faith I understand. By faith I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, power from on high, and by faith I lay down my life. Heb. 10:38-39.

Faith does not put you in an easy chair with your hands in your lap and let you imagine that you are and have everything the Scriptures speak about. Faith makes you active. Here are a few examples of how faith is made perfect by works: by faith Noah built the ark; by faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; by faith he kept the Passover; by faith Peter cast the net out on the right side of the boat; by faith Luther burned the papal bull. All the works of the saints were done by faith; this is precisely why they shine so brightly down through the centuries. By faith we put to death our members that are on the earth, put off sin, and put on the new man; and if you don't do this, you do not believe. Those who do not overcome sin are unbelieving, no matter how much they speak about faith.

Grace is not meant to replace a God-fearing life or cover up ungodliness—grace is help. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. 4:16. Jesus came "full of grace and truth." "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:14 and 17. We see from this that grace is not meant to cover up anything, because grace and truth belong together. The law—what is required of man—came by Moses, but he could not help the people with the burden the law placed on them. Jesus came with help. He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden." That is why Paul said, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Rom. 6:14. If we were still under the law, then, of course, sin would continue to reign, because all we would have would be our own strength. But we are now under grace—help in Jesus—so sin need not have

dominion over us. Therefore those who commit sin are not under grace, because if they had received help from Jesus, they would not have sinned. They are, in fact, under the law. The harlot's sorcery of substituting grace for a victorious life does not help them at all.

"Yes," you say, "but doesn't grace cover our old life?" You have to realize that your old life needs to be confessed—it has to be brought into the light; and then the blood, by faith, will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. This is what grace really is; it is help. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand . . ." Rom. 5:1-2. None of us have deserved this; it is grace (help) which Jesus brought in its fullness.

"But," you say, "if we are so victorious and become so God-fearing, won't this make the blood superfluous?" Just listen for a moment! When we talk about victory, it is obvious that you cannot have victory over the things that you do not have light over. Your conscience does not condemn you for anything you are not aware of, does it? But don't you believe that in spite of this, God still sees some ugly things in you? "The heavens are not pure in His sight." Job 15:15. And Paul says, "For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." 1 Cor. 4:4. We must go from light to light. It is precisely because we are under grace that the sin which we are unaware of does not condemn us. Nevertheless, grace is followed by truth; therefore it is grace that the truth is revealed to us little by little. This is where we need the blood of Jesus for cleansing. As I walk in the light, the blood cleanses.

This is illustrated in the old covenant. "For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." Rom. 5:13. "For where there is no law there is no transgression." Rom. 4:15. "But when the commandment came, sin revived . . ." Rom. 7:9. Israel knew nothing of sin before the law came. Sin was definitely present, but it was not imputed to them. But when they received light—when the commandment came—they saw that they had lived in sin and needed cleansing. "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people." Heb. 9:19. As long as this process of sanctification is not complete in us—as long as the disciple is not like his Master, Jesus—we need to go from light to light and gradually be cleansed in Jesus' blood. This will continue throughout our whole sojourn here on earth.

Yet the harlot does not want to hear about victory; she just pleads grace and the blood. She wants to continue to lie, backbite, and be bad-tempered; then the blood is supposed to cleanse her. Then when she becomes bad-tempered, lies, and backbites again, the blood is supposed to cleanse her anew. This is witchcraft! This is not according to the laws of the Spirit in Christ Jesus. John wrote to them that they might not sin. But if anything that bad should happen, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous who is the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 2:1-2. In other words, we must walk in the fear of God.

This is how the bride labors and strives mightily, exhorting every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that she may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Col. 1:28-29. This is why we see certain words recurring again and again in the Scriptures, such as work, exercise, strive, labor, give all diligence, and flee. Phil. 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:11 and 4:7; 2 Pet. 1:4-10 and 3:11. These words are a great offense to the harlot. They are totally contrary to all her sorcery, which is why she calls them bondage.

"You don't think you are going to help God with your salvation?" she cries. She claims that, as if by magic, we are suddenly made perfect in Christ. We become the bride, king, and priest, and then we can sing:

*Just as I am, my Savior dear,
Me in His arms to heaven will bear.
An entrance is mine, His bride I shall be.
I've nothing to do, He did all for me;
To heaven I sail, amen, yea, amen,
Just as I am, just as I am."*

Can you not hear that these words are the exact opposite of the sound teaching of Paul? 2 Tim. 1:13. They have turned to fables. 2 Tim. 4:3-5. This is not surprising, because they want to make a business out of it all.

Jerusalem

The harlot's workers are merchants, and the harlot is called Babylon, the city of commerce. The bride, on the other hand, is called Jerusalem, the city of sacrifice. The tribes of Israel went there to sacrifice, not to do business. Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple. Therefore the bride's workers—the church—are not merchants; they are priests, or servants. The greatest among you is the slave of all. Paul asked the Ephesians to remember this in the future so they would not be deceived by wolves in sheep's clothing. Just read his farewell message to them:

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:29-35.

If they had remembered this, the savage wolves would soon have been exposed. I seriously doubt that any of them had so much care for the sheep that they exhorted them day and night with tears. Perhaps you have never in your life met such a shepherd. If you think back, those whom you did meet were probably satisfied when you gave them plenty of good food, money, and honor. Their interest was in shearing the sheep. Wake up and remember Paul, and you will recognize the wolves of our day.

Listen to what Paul reminds the Thessalonians of: "For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only

the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." 1 Thess. 2:5-12.

Paul was definitely not a merchant. He was not an inhabitant of Babylon. He belonged to the city of sacrifice, Jerusalem. All the work in the church (the bride) is based on sacrifice. The priests (the servants) do not become great and rich men on earth. Neither do they get a name for themselves in this world. And because they are not trying to make an impression on anyone, they have no form or comeliness for the people to desire them. Is. 53:2.

There are many preachers who are merchants. Bible schools produce a lot of them, but where can you find a servant? "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel." Phil. 2:19-22.

"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me." Col. 4:10-11.

As we can see, there were not many. On the contrary, there were some who meddled in things that were none of their business, and they no longer labored.

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." 2 Thess. 3:11-12. They considered godliness a means of gain. 1 Tim. 6:5-6. They wanted to make a living, but Paul would have none of that. Here we all need to be on the alert. If someone who preaches the gospel comes to live in your house, and you notice that he does not want to work, send him home. You can see that all he wants to do is drink coffee and have his afternoon nap. Or he sits and writes and puts logs on the fire, but he doesn't

even bother to carry in the firewood, not to mention splitting it (this would be suitable exercise for him). Just send him home. He is not fit to be a worker in God's kingdom. If someone fails in his earthly occupation and so turns to being a preacher of the Word, he makes a shameful mistake. Such a person does not give up anything for the gospel's sake. All he does is seek gain. God has never called anyone to proclaim the gospel who was not already working to proclaim the gospel. Elisha was plowing. Twelve yoke of oxen went before him when God called him to be a prophet. 1 Kings 19:19. Moses, Saul, and David were shepherds. Gideon was in the process of threshing. Levi was sitting in the custom's booth, and Peter was busy with his fishing nets, etc. They were all occupied, but they gave up everything. It was not gain for them according to the flesh. They neither earned more money, nor did they have an easier life. They wore themselves out; they sacrificed everything. What things were gain to them they counted loss, even rubbish, for Christ's sake. Phil. 3:7-8.

Not that they did not have the right to live by the gospel. If someone really does the work of an evangelist, he has the right to live by the gospel; but even this right they gave up.

"Nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." 2 Thess. 3:8-10.

Paul showed them by his works what Christianity was, and by his works he out-maneuvered all the deceitful workers—those who thought of gain. Paul could not out-maneuver them by speaking, because they were just as eloquent as Paul; but they were not willing to deny themselves, and on this point Paul was able to expose them. Many such deceitful workers came to Corinth. They wanted to appear just as good as Paul, and the Corinthians could not discern between them. They considered Paul's speech contemptible and his bodily presence weak. He was not among them as a "bragging pastor," but as a servant. He did not come to them with his knowledge according to the flesh, because he did not want their faith to be grounded on human wisdom—that they should believe because a theologian had said it. He had no desire to satisfy their imagined "greatness" and their itching ears. His desire was that their faith was grounded in the power of God. 1 Cor. 2:1-5. He wanted them to consider the works. "What we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present." 2 Cor. 10:10-12.

In other words, a servant of Jesus must manifest the power of God through his works. This is obvious from the command Jesus gave. "Teaching them to *observe* [keep] all things that I have commanded you." (Emphasis added.) Matt. 28:20. The harlot's workers are exposed whenever there is talk of "keeping" and "doing." The worst thing they can hear about is "works"—Christianity. This is an area where the servants of Christ have a task to perform: to expose these merchants of Babylon.

"But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." 2 Cor. 11:12-13.

May there be many of us in these end times who follow in Paul's and Timothy's steps. Even though we have a right to many things as servants of Christ, let us sacrifice our rights in order to be the servants and slaves of all, lest our ministry be discredited. 2 Cor. 6:3-4.

What Is the Result of the Work of the Harlot?

"For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Rev. 19:2.

"For by your sorcery all the nations were deceived." Rev. 18:23.

The earth was corrupted and the nations were deceived—what a terrible result! What a catastrophe! When something becomes commonplace, people accept it as lawful and right; but we must say with Luther in this matter: "It is nevertheless the very nature of things that no Christian should have a part or confidence in it, but must condemn it as the worst sort of blasphemy and idolatry; and therefore avoid carefully all contact with it like the plague, regardless of how thickly they spread it on and boast that it is ancient tradition and has the approval of the masses. One can just as easily go astray when one's following is great as when it is not. He who drifts with the current will eventually be lost in the sea." [\[3\]](#)

It is quite common to hear people say, "Do you believe that our theologians have made a mistake? Is it only a few who are right?" These questions clearly reveal that their faith is based on human wisdom, on the opinion of the masses—contrary to God's Word that testifies from cover to cover that "the many" are false prophets and "the many" corrupt the gospel. 2 Cor. 2:17. The prophet Micah stood alone against 400 false prophets. The fact that they were many did not make them right. 1 Kings 22:6. It is only the few who find the way and go through the narrow gate.

"For by your sorcery all the nations were deceived." Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. That is the right way, but the harlot has deceived them. Where are they now? Instead of coming to Jesus they have come to the beast—the Antichrist.

"And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'" Rev. 13:3-4.

This is the result of the work of the harlot. "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." Rev. 17:3.

Here we can see where the harlot is sitting. She has become a friend of the beast, which carries and supports her. People do not like the beast. They were created in the image of God, and they look up to what they have fallen from. They yearn for something better, and they labor to get a better life and to become better people. In this labor they have looked to Christianity to receive help, and the harlot has taken this work

in hand. People want to achieve this as easily as possible, and so the harlot has been able to satisfy them with her sorcery, hereby gaining power over them. Thus by her harlotry she has managed to combine the first and the second man—the beast and Jesus. Of course this is not possible, but this is how the beast has become religious. The beast has been tamed, whereas it should have been put to death. The people have been spared from its claws and fangs and instead have received a wolf in sheep's clothing. The harlot has become a protection for the beast, because the beast supports religion. Thus no one needs to fear it any longer. Once in a while you can hear some voices saying that things are not as they should be, but the usual response is: "Isn't it better that there is something rather than nothing? Jesus' words 'I could wish you were cold or hot,' cannot be taken too seriously. We should be glad for the warmth we get, even if it is only lukewarm. We should be glad for the support we receive even if they are not Christians. At least they are interested in religion, aren't they?"

And so they speak in direct contradiction to the Word of God that says: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Prov. 15:8. We need to ask the priests concerning the law, as they did in Haggai's days: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?"'" Then the priests answered and said, 'No.' And Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?' So the priests answered and said, 'It shall be unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.'" Haggai 2:11-14.

We learn from this that the unclean is not made clean by the holy, but that the clean is made unclean by the unholy. Those who live according to their lusts are dead while they live, even if they are religious. 1 Tim. 5:6. The world is the dead body, and if I become a part of the world, I become unclean in spite of all that I do and sacrifice. Therefore we have this exhortation: "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I

will receive you." 2 Cor. 6:17.

However, whenever the beast (in his sheep's clothing) is in danger of being discovered behind the harlot as his protection, he simply provides funds for a new church building or for restoring an old one, and so people are taken up with that for a long time. When the work is finished, there will be a great ceremony. Because it is the work of the harlot and of the beast, they are of course represented by their respective spokespersons in an impressive display of unity. Woe to him who questions their work. Then the shout will go up as in former times: "Great is Diana's temple"—the church, the old country church, the cathedral, the valuable stained-glass windows, the beautiful altar piece, and the antique pulpit. To them this is Christianity! Acts 19:34.

"Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord!' . . . 'Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.' For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place.'" Jer. 7:2-7. "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes?" Verse 8-11.

Here we see that people have always been the same; but Jesus made Himself a whip of cords. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body." John 2:19-21. Here we can see God's mind revealed. He does not dwell in houses built with hands, but "with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Is. 57:15.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you." 1 Cor. 6:19. This is the temple Jesus wanted to build, and this is what the bride is working on. This work does not need the help of the beast with all its subsidies. On the other hand, the harlot, who wants to be great in this world,

must have something to show—some shining fruits of her work. She needs big, fancy churches and expensive decorations. Her life is not hidden with Christ in God.

This is what happens in a revival when a little flock has been saved. One of the first things they do is form a building committee even if the entire assembly consists of only eight to ten people. Of course they need a place where they can have their meetings, but when the building project becomes the focal point, the whole thing ends up in harlotry. Soon the collection of money becomes the main point of the meeting, and if that is successful, the work is succeeding and is being blessed. Building a meeting hall stirs greater interest than building up the body, the temple for the Holy Spirit. When the meeting hall is finished, it stands there like the tower of Babel—evidence of the church's power and fruit, even its glory; a gathering place for the flock.

The beast is able to live because it uses the harlot as a protective shield. It also works independently of the harlot and puts out its claws as far as it dares. It looks forward to the day when it will be able to cast the harlot off its back and be rid of her yoke. Whenever the beast has inadvertently put out its claws too far, the harlot cries out in fear of losing her grants and her support. We hear such cries whenever there is a national election; freedom of religion is a good election slogan. Then those who never go to a meeting or read the Bible—even those who hardly ever attend church—are afraid of losing their religion. But when the beast notices any danger signals (that the time has not yet come to remove the shield), it quickly draws its claws back again and promises freedom of religion with many good words. Then the harlot keeps on riding, even though she feels a little less secure in the saddle and her grants and subsidies have been reduced.

"And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled." Rev. 17:16-17.

This is the result of the work of the harlot. This is what Jesus prophesied when He said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." Matt. 5:13. This is a terrible result. We have already seen this fulfilled in some countries where the beast has cast off the harlot and the people have trampled the salt under their feet.

Paul also prophesied about this and said: "But know this, that in the last days

perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" 2 Tim. 3:1-5. They lack power, therefore the works that result from a life in the fear of God are lacking; all they have is an appearance of godliness. The entire Western world is regarded as "Christian," even though they love themselves, love money, are proud, etc. This is how the harlot has ordered things by her sorcery with infant baptism and the wine of her fornication. Christianity has become like "clouds without water, carried about by the winds." Jude 12. They carry on missionary work, while the heathen know full well that hatred, murder, and war rage in the so-called "Christian" countries. The gospel (the cloud) came. They expected rain—a God-fearing life—but no rain fell. All they saw was a form without power. The day will come—that terrible day, when the harlot will reap what she has sown. The gospel, which is the salt that has lost its power, will be trampled underfoot by the people. They did not receive what they had expected: help to become better and to regain the image of God they had lost. They were led astray, and now they are awakening. They hate the harlot and will expose her and leave her desolate. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

This is what Jesus wanted to save the people from when He said, after He had spoken the Sermon on the Mount, "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." Matt. 7:26-27. In the following passage we see the fulfillment of this prophecy: "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.'" Rev. 14:8.

"Babylon the great!" Oh, how the harlot has built everything to make it great to gain many followers—this has been her glory. Oh, how intensely she has worked with Jesus' words, with her Christian education, and Bible schools; but she has never come to *doing* Jesus' words, to practicing the Sermon on the Mount. "No," she says, "Jesus only spoke these words so that we could see how we fall short and how much we need His grace. The Sermon on the Mount is not the gospel; it is the law." The only portion of the Sermon on the Mount the harlot has use for is: "Forgive us our trespasses." Her Christian education at her Bible schools amounts to the teaching that you can become blessed by faith alone, without works. But she has completely deceived herself, as James writes: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." James 1:22.

Truly, the house of the harlot has become great, and many have become rich and famous by it. But soon the day is coming when the storm will break loose and the rains will beat upon that house. Then it will collapse, and the cry will go up, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"

"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.'" Rev. 18:4.

In that day, you will not be able to hide in any of the rooms (denominations, religious groups) in the house. The entire house will fall, and great will be its fall. If you hear Jesus' words and do not act accordingly, you are helping to build "Babylon the great" regardless of what your church affiliation is or what doctrinal creed you confess.

Yet there are many who say, "Leaving a denomination is the easy way out. It is like running away. We must remain where we are and be salt. If we stand firm, we can reach the people, but if we leave we will achieve nothing, because we will be alone."

This sounds very reasonable, of course, but if you are going to be honest with yourself, you will have to admit that you are afraid of the reproach. You like to stand before the people, and perhaps you even receive a little honor for speaking the truth. But you speak the truth in the spirit of the harlot. That is why they tolerate you. Listen to this if you want to be salt in Babylon and correct everything that is wrong there:

"We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies." Jer. 51:9.

"Yes, but doesn't it say that we shall not forsake our own assembly?" you say. Very well, if Babylon is your assembly, then stay there; but if you are of "My people," then listen to the voice from heaven; "Come out of her."

"To him who believes belongs the glory." (Norw.) 1 Pet. 2:7. If you follow your reasoning and want to have the honor of being a healer in Babylon among the multitudes, your glory will become your shame. The disease of Babylon will contaminate you and make you partakers of her plagues. You cannot even heal yourself. But if you have faith to go outside the camp to the few who are God-fearing, God will honor you.

The result of the harlot's work is a building reduced to rubble and a world trampled under the feet of the beast.

What Is the Result of the Work of the Bride?

Just as the result of the harlot's work was, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great," (the house whose fall was great), so the house which was built on the rock, the house which did not fall in the day of storms, is the result of the work of the bride.

Jesus prophesied about this when He said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." Matt. 7:24-25.

We have already seen how the bride works to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe everything Jesus has commanded. This results in the house that was founded on the rock—the house that stands on the day of storms. And now let us read about the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth." Rev. 14:1-3.

The hundred and forty-four thousand had built on Zion—on the rock. There they stood together with the Lamb and sang a new song on the day of storm—the day when Babylon fell. The many waters and the thunder that destroyed the harlot's house was like the playing of many harps to the bride. It had also been like that for the bride during her life here on earth where her afflictions had worked for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. 4:17. Those on Zion had been redeemed from the earth. As disciples they had forsaken everything. They were redeemed from among men to be the firstfruits. They hated father and mother, sister and brother, and even their own life. They had followed the Lamb wherever He went, and in their mouth there was no guile. They were without spot. The result of her work was not a

deception but a fulfillment of the promise: salvation from the affliction.

"For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thess. 5:3-4 and 8-9.

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36.

The result of the bride's work is the gathering together of the firstfruits. They will be spared from the things that will come over the earth, so they can stand before the Son of Man. The bride, not the harlot, is Jesus' elect. While the harlot is maturing and in her deception is preparing for the great fall on the day of storms, the bride is making herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb. Therefore, whereas the result of the work of the harlot is, "And great was its fall!", the result of the work of the bride is: *The Marriage Feast!*

"For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.' Again they said, 'Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!' . . . Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" Rev. 19:2-9.

The first time we read "Alleluia" in the New Testament is when the harlot is cast down. It is not surprising that there will be such great rejoicing when she is destroyed, the one who so vehemently opposed the work of Jesus and His bride—she who corrupted the earth and deceived all the nations. By her own deception she has destroyed her own house and put all the nations under the feet of the beast; while they are suffering (being trampled down and crushed

under the feet of the beast) there will be a marriage in heaven! What a world of difference there is between the work of the bride and the work of the harlot. Many times it looked so hopeless! The harlot had such great power. Everyone had wanted to take the easiest way to the goal. They believed in her sorcery, and the harlot closed in and killed those that she feared would expose her sorcery. Nevertheless, those who had an ear to hear heard the voice from heaven and went out from her. So the bride's work was not in vain. A firstfruit was redeemed—but there weren't many. Through all this darkness and conflict a bride was chosen for the Lamb, a little flock that was predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Everything that happened worked together for her best. Rom. 8:28-29. It was for her as the melting pot is for gold. She leaves this earthly life like purified gold. She was led by the Spirit of God, and her works were righteous. These righteous works will become that wedding dress of pure, shining, white linen with which she will adorn herself at her marriage with the Lamb.

However, the Lamb and His wife will not leave the earth and its people in the power of the beast forever. By now the harlot has played all her cards, and the people are waking up to her sorcery. They will be filled with fear and foreboding at the roaring of the sea and the waves. God's wrath will be fulfilled on the earth. During this time, the beast will have power. Rev. 17:17. But then the time will come for Jesus and the saints.

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Rev. 19:11-19.

This will be an invasion like no other! These "paratroopers" will be without equal. Now the world will experience the fulfillment of the example Jesus gave when He cleansed the temple with the whip of cords. Now the earth will become a house of prayer, and people will be liberated from the beast and the false prophet, who will be cast into the lake of fire; and the dragon, that old serpent, who is the devil and Satan, will be bound for a thousand years. Rev.

20:2.

Jesus was alone when He cleansed the temple. But when He comes to assume power on earth, He will be together with His bride—the called, chosen, and faithful. Rev. 17:14. Then the parable about the nobleman who went on a long journey and came back with royal power will be fulfilled. Then Jesus will set His feet on the Mount of Olives and restore the kingdom again to Israel. Acts 1:6. Then the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled in its deepest sense: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." And there will be peace for a thousand years.

Whereas the result of the harlot's work is to deliver up the earth and the people to the power of the Antichrist and the beast, leading to war, plagues, and death, the result of the bride's work together with Jesus is to *liberate* the earth and the peoples from the beast, the Antichrist, war, plagues, and death.

The Beast

"But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."'"" Luke 4:4.

But the beast manages with bread alone. There is not just one gospel in the world; there are many. There are as many gospels as there are people fighting for power on the earth. Jesus came with His gospel for mankind, a gospel of salvation and blessing, and He said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Satan does not want to admit that. Even though he has lost his power in heaven, he does not intend to give up willingly his power on earth. Rev. 12:9-12. He also proclaims a message to the people through his servants, and great multitudes are deceived by these gospels. Yet it is important to notice that his gospel contains the promise of bread alone. If you do not receive any other food, you will turn into a beast.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Gen. 2:7.

Our bodies consist only of what is of the earth; and to keep our bodies healthy, we turn to the earth. Everything we eat—our bread—comes from the earth. By the same token, our spirit, which comes from God, must also receive nourishment. Therefore we must turn to God and live by every word that proceeds from His mouth. People neglect this nourishment for their spirit, and as a result, they become like beasts, and everything in their lives revolves around their bodies and earthly things. That is why when you see an animal in the field, its head is to the ground. Likewise the vast majority of people only have a mind for the temporal, i.e., the earthly.

There are many political parties fighting for power in the world. They are fighting for raw materials and living space, and each of them proclaims its own gospel. Their promises are only for the body. They do not want to acknowledge that all authority has been given to Jesus. In order to gain the confidence of all levels of society, there are political parties that offer a message tailored for each individual. There is a song some of them sing:

*We've no expectation that from heav'n comes salvation,
From gods up above or from any high pow'rs.*

*No, we'll ourselves gain it, together attain it.
In one front we are joined; we'll make victory ours.
For all that's been stolen, we demand retribution.
We want a free place for our knowledge to grow.
We wield our own hammers to forge our solution
While the iron is hot, we will strike every blow.*

And another one:

*Give me the bitter, brazen ones, fearless and filled with ire—
The proud and godless who to mystical things do not aspire,
Who boldly will create their heaven here as they desire.*

They say "religion is opium for the masses; only weak people feel a need for it." Yet sayings like this are repulsive to many, so Satan must also be able to provide something that sounds better. The beast has the harlot on its back, so there must also be a Christian People's Party. Now they can all rule in union until the time comes when Satan can gather them all together into one beast—one party with one leader, and that leader will be the Antichrist.

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." 1 Cor. 12:13.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Verse 27. God's Word is a hammer. Jer. 23:29.

We are called to be the body of Christ, which we become by being baptized with the same Spirit. Christ is the Head. Every head has a spirit; therefore those who receive that spirit become the body that belongs to that head. We need to be on guard there because the beast has many heads, and there is a particular spirit that comes along with each head.

We see that when the winds blow over the sea of humanity, these beasts make their appearance. Dan. 7:2-3. People are dissatisfied, and everything is in turmoil. "Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out; they cry out for help because of the arm of the mighty. But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven?'" Job 35:9-11.

They do not turn to God; but a head comes up from the sea of humanity with a new gospel, a new message for the suffering masses. This message is

proclaimed in such a powerful spirit that it sweeps the people along with it. This new head has a glorious program to raise the standard of living, and the people are enthusiastic about it. Thus the head begins to receive a body. The people are filled with the same spirit, and they become the body of the beast. They are forged under the hammer of the beast.

Since this head arises from the sea of humanity, the sea must have given it nourishment. In the fullness of time, when people are ripe for it, the head will emerge. Then gradually the whole body will appear and assume power.

This is how the beast emerges. Such a beast can become so large that it appears as if its body could fill the whole earth. Each beast has its time, and then another beast replaces it. Dan. 7:12. Each of them have their development until the last beast arises, having seven heads and ten horns; and all the world will marvel at it and follow it. Rev. 13:3. All the other beasts will be united in this one beast. The first beast Daniel saw was a lion, but the people were not ready to receive it. There was too much power in the salt; therefore the lion was forced to undergo a change: to stand on two legs and have the heart of a man. But then we see that it reappears as a bear, but it had to undergo another change, until finally it can appear in the fullness of its power. Even though the harlot is still riding on this last beast's back, she is no longer able to tame it. The salt has lost its flavor, its power. The time has come for her to be trampled by the beast. The bride will already have been taken up when this happens. She was not defiled by these beasts and was not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. She knows that ruling together with these beasts will only result in misery. She thinks like Jesus who said, "My hour has not yet come." She waits for Jesus, her Bridegroom. Then the time will come for her to rule.

The harlot does not have this living hope, because she wants to rule with several men at the same time. Her thoughts are only of gain and enjoyment until the time has come when Jeremiah 4:30-31 will be fulfilled: "And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life. For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion [the harlot of that day] bewailing herself; she spreads her hands, saying, 'Woe is me now, for my soul is weary because of murderers!'" Then the bride will sing a new song on Mount Zion together with the Lamb.

When the harlot is cast off the back of the beast and the bride is taken up, the beast will have full freedom. Then he who has restrained the beast will have been taken out of the way, and the man of sin, the son of perdition, the lawless one, will be revealed. 2 Thess. 2:6-8. Now the beast can do as it has sung for many years: Lift up its own hammer and smite the hot iron, creating a heaven to its own liking. To accomplish its purpose the beast needs the godless and the proud. Now the beast will begin to set its "mark" on everyone, and those who will not take the "mark" of the beast will be killed. They will not be permitted to buy or sell. This signals the advent of the great tribulation—not only because the beast is ruling, but also because the time for God's judgment has come.

"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'" Rev. 14:6-7.

Even in this time of need God does not leave people to themselves. He gives them a gospel. However, it is not the gospel of the bride anymore. Rather it is an appeal to the people to worship God who judges, to give Him the glory, and to humble themselves under His mighty hand. How needful it will be for them to hear this gospel during a time when everyone is forced to worship the beast if they want to stay alive.

Listen, you who belong neither to the bride nor to the harlot, you who do not even hear the Word of Jesus, let alone do it: "Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.'" Rev. 14:9-10.

This tells us that no one has a future apart from the body of Christ. The bodies of the beasts have only a time, two times, and half a time, and that is the end of them. Listen, you who are part of the body of one of the beasts: "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time." Dan. 7:11-12.

The Spirit of Antichrist

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." 1 John 4:1-3.

John writes much about this. The spirit of Antichrist was already active in John's day, and it is no less active in our days. On the contrary, this spirit has been working in people down through the ages until now and will continue to do so until they are ready to receive the Antichrist himself.

This spirit of Antichrist (against Christ) is the spirit that the bride has fought against; and when we awaken to this fact, we will realize that we meet this spirit everywhere. Since we are to test the spirits, John has given us instructions about how we can know them. "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." Consequently, the spirit that does not confess this is the spirit of Antichrist. This spirit is against Jesus Christ come in the flesh.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Rom. 8:29.

Christ is manifested in the flesh when we are conformed to the image of the Son. We can well understand that Satan is against this. He wants to be the only one who is manifested in the flesh, and we see him manifested everywhere. When people are ill-tempered, offended, lovers of money, selfish, anxious, envious, etc., Satan is being manifested in the flesh.

God's call to us is to be saved from all this and that Jesus may be manifested in us instead. When this is to be practiced in reality, the battle really begins. Now we will see how the spirit of the Antichrist rises up in you and in all those around you. "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh." If you follow this exhortation, then Christ will be manifested in the flesh. However, no sooner does the exhortation come than the voice of opposition begins to speak out: "Is there any point in *that*? Am I always supposed to do what he says? That would be the last thing I'd

do, submit to a fellow like that!" Etc.

But we read further: "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully." Can you see how the spirit of Antichrist rises up? "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth." 1 Pet. 2:18-23.

But this anti-spirit says, "You cannot take this literally. We cannot follow in Jesus' steps who committed no sin, because then we would have to be sinless. No, we are sinners, and we must plead the blood and pray the prayer of the tax collector," etc.

We hear this everywhere: "The forgiveness of sins is possible, but Christ manifested in the flesh? No! That is a dangerous doctrine—sinless perfection—a false doctrine. Be careful!!!" But you who read this, can you not discern between the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist? In any case, you ought to have at least as much understanding as one old man in a meeting where the assembly was horrified because we taught freedom from sin. I asked, "Who do you think would be upset the most if you are set free from sin?" "The devil," answered the old man. Well, if you are afraid of upsetting him, then resist Christ manifested in the flesh—an overcoming life—as much as you can. But listen to this: "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest." 1 John 3:8-10.

John was particularly concerned that we should not be deceived; therefore his letters are like the sharpest two-edged sword. He had noticed that this spirit of Antichrist had begun to work in those to whom he wrote and that several had been defiled, even deceived, so that they had become antichrists and had gone out from them. 1 John 2:18-19. By this he knew that it was the last hour.

These antichrists did not begin by denying Jesus' name—not at all! They continued to work for God, but in the spirit of Antichrist. Because they were excellent speakers, it was not easy to recognize them for what they were. But we are told that we can recognize them by whether or not they confess that Christ has come in the flesh. And then John continues to give us some examples:

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and

do not practice the truth." 1 John 1:6. "If we say that we have no sin, ^[4] we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Verse 8. "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 2:4. "He who says he abides in Him ought

himself also to walk just as He walked." Verse 6. "He who says *he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.*" (*Emphasis added*). Verse 9.

John was not deceived by what they said—by their sheep's clothing; he looked at the fruits—what kinds of works they produced. He had learned from the pattern he saw on Patmos. Rev. 2:1-2. He wanted to see Christ manifested in their flesh before he would believe them.

Paul said, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Acts 20:29. Paul held these wolves at bay. This spirit of Antichrist did not gain power as long as he was alive, but he could see that they would become bolder after his death. For this reason, he writes, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." 2 Tim. 4:3-4. When we read Peter's second epistle and the epistle of Jude, we see how things had already developed in those days. How do you think things are today then? If the apostles were not able to restrain these wolves in sheep's clothing, who can?

Open your eyes and test the spirits, and you will see a terrible sight. It is so terrible that most people do not dare to look at it. They close their eyes and say, "We must not judge; after all, we are only human," and so they are helplessly led astray by these "antichrists."

Here we do well to remember Jesus' words when He sat on the Mount of Olives: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." Luke 19:42-44.

The fall of the harlot of that day was imminent when Jesus spoke. If only they had known the things that made for peace, they could have been saved; but it was hidden from them. Because of their unbelief of the Word, they stumbled at the stumbling stone who was Jesus. God had given Him to them as the

cornerstone in the building; but the builders rejected Him.

The builders of that day were the Pharisees and the scribes. They were responsible for educating the people and instructing the children. They were the architects of society and sat on Moses' seat, but they did not do what they taught. The building was out of alignment. Jesus came and He should have been made the cornerstone of the building; but when the time came to straighten it out, it began to creak at the seams, and the builders were panic-stricken. If we read the Sermon on the Mount, we see how Jesus was going to straighten out the building: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer." "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." Matt. 7:24-25.

But it was not possible to straighten out the building. The builders did not want to acknowledge their errors. They rejected the Stone, which was chosen of God and precious. So the house fell, and its fall was great. The Roman legions came and laid siege to Jerusalem. The need became so great that they ate their own children, and the temple—the pride of the harlot—was razed to the ground. Not one stone was left upon another.

Down through the ages many have tried to build in the same way. They have built up great earthly empires, but they rejected Jesus as the cornerstone and so they have all come to ruin. Let us learn from this.

The apostles began to build anew with Jesus as the cornerstone. They were not satisfied simply to hear His word; no, it had to be done! We realize of course that this threatened Satan, and so he sent the spirit of Antichrist among them to disrupt their building, but they were able to test the spirits, and so these antichrists had to depart from them. It was revealed they were not of them. However, these opposers did not give up building just because of that. They put

their threshold right beside the apostles' threshold, and their doorposts right beside the apostles' doorposts with only a wall between; and they defiled the name of Jesus by the abominations they committed. Ezek. 43:8.

Let us see how they do this. One of the beams they use most is: "We can do nothing." This sounds true enough, and people gladly cross this threshold. It resembles so closely the word of Jesus, "*Without Me* you can do nothing." (Emphasis added). John 15:5. But with Jesus' words, the doorposts immediately become narrow, because He has also said that if we remain in Him, we will bear much fruit.

Another beam they use in their building is: "The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin." This resembles so closely the apostle's beam: "If we walk in the light as He is in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. When the apostles lay their beam, "He who sins is of devil" in the building, right away the opposers are there with their beam; "My grace is sufficient for you." And "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." When the apostles lay their beam, "He who is led by the Spirit is a child of God," they come with their beam, "All those who believe in Jesus are God's children." And when the apostles say, "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," they come with their beam, "Come, kneel at the foot of the cross."

This is how they build. Many people say, "I can't hear any difference." Don't you see that the spirit in the apostles' doctrine is Christ manifested in the flesh, and that these antichrists want to explain that away? Don't you realize that there is a wall between the two? Can't you see that one door is narrow and the other wide?

The building of the Antichrist is also a towering structure. Many people enter through its door; but the door of the apostles' house is narrow, and few are they who find it. Many times the disciples were anxious and troubled because they were so alone, but Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He who is of the truth hears My voice." And John writes, "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us." 1 John 4:5-6.

This brought them rest. They could not get anyone else to join them except for those who had ears to hear and who were of the truth: those who were of God. It was best to be rid of the others anyway.

John said, "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world."

How fitting this is when we consider their large conferences, conventions, and other prominent gatherings. We see how the world has put its stamp on them. Worldly dignitaries are often represented; sometimes they open the conference. Worldly musicians are hired for the occasion, and highly educated people are at the forefront. The fact that they are not spiritual is totally irrelevant. Truly they are of the world; they speak of the world, and the world hears them. The whole affair is concluded with a party that is attended by the elite, and those who are invited feel like they really are "somebody." Then the tuxedos and evening dresses are brought out, and when cigars are passed around, the evening has reached a high point. This does not remind us much of Christ manifested in the flesh! Hear the voice from heaven: "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." Rev. 18:4.

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." 2 John 79.

"Whoever . . . does not abide in the doctrine of Christ." What is the "doctrine of Christ"? Jesus said to a multitude that followed Him: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Mark 8:34. This is in essence the "doctrine of Christ." If you abide in it, if you "deny yourself," the life of Jesus will be manifested in you; Christ is manifested in the flesh. Then you have both the Father and the Son.

But then these antichrists come and preach to you: "Don't you realize that the way you are thinking now is utter bondage? You don't think you can help God with your salvation, do you? No, the work is finished. Jesus has done everything, and you are to do nothing. Jesus in you will do it. Just get more and more immersed in the love of Christ, and everything will work out automatically. You must not take each sin individually and try to deny it! All of that is cleansed away in Jesus' blood! We are called to liberty in Jesus; do not allow yourself to be brought again under the yoke of bondage," etc.

The following will give you an example of the subtle way in which the spirit of the Antichrist interprets the truth. This is an excerpt from one of the largest religious magazines in Norway:

Imputed Righteousness and the Righteousness of Life

(Jeremiah 33:16)

God's requirements and conditions for entering heaven are very precise. Just listen to the words of Jesus: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:20. This is the requirement of the law. But "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son." Rom. 8:3. In other words, in Christ God gave us exactly what He required of us through the law. Now the Lord Jesus Himself is our righteousness. What a grace! Our righteousness is now perfect, because Jesus is perfect. I must say that this certainly exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees!

Our righteousness is unchangeable. Even though we have stumbled and sinned, Jesus has not sinned. Our righteousness is eternally secure. It is kept safely in heaven for us in Christ.

But what about our perfection here on earth? God requires this also; but Christ is our life also on this earth. The perfect life He lived on earth is now my life before God. A Christian has all God's pleasure over his life for Jesus' sake; and he can live with a smile! "As Jesus was, so are we in this world."

If this sounds right to you, you are being subtly led away from the sound doctrine and are being turned to fables. Have you not read further in Romans 8 where it says that God gave us Jesus so that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in *us* who do not *walk* according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Emphasis added). The spirit of Antichrist does away with all personal righteousness. It tells us: "All our righteousness is in Jesus, and it is in safekeeping in heaven." Because of this teaching, Satan can rule here as much as he wants, unhindered by the "Christians."

Just notice how these antichrists preach. Granted, they read God's Word, but they do not shed any light on what it says. All they do is tell some touching stories and give a few quotes from other people (preferably someone who is famous in the world), and pass on things they have learned at Bible school or seminary. But Jeremiah says what their end will be: "'Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,' says the Lord, 'who steal My words every one from his neighbor.'" Jer. 23:30. "But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil

way and from the evil of their doings." Verse 22.

Yet you like all these stories. You think they are so uplifting and there is such a pleasant spirit about them. Quite true, but that is because there is neither sword nor cross in them. You have been bewitched, and you are living in blissful ignorance of how pathetic your life really is. You have been led astray from working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. You have been drawn away from the doctrine of Christ. You do not have the Father or the Son; you have lost everything you gained by your labors. When you took up your cross and denied yourself, you had victory over your anger, anxiety, idle talk, backbiting, and vanity; but now you have backslidden to where you were before. You have lost your reward. Now when you go to a meeting where the word of the cross is being proclaimed, you think it is so heavy; you miss the joy of the Lord. You don't like the Word that is as a fire, like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Jer. 23:29. You feel so condemned. You feel that there is such a hard spirit present, and so you run back to the antichrists—the sorcerers.

Beware! We need to call out this warning more now than in the days of John. We see plainly that it is the spirit of Antichrist that is working in the harlot, and her merchants are antichrists. Of course, the vast majority is more or less ignorant of this. They have been led astray. That is why we want the voice from heaven to sound forth louder than ever before: "Come out of her my people!" We will make this light shine whatever the cost.

Christ Manifested in the Flesh

If Christ is able to be manifested in the flesh—in us—then He Himself must have come in the flesh at some time. And He did. This is the very essence of Paul's gospel.

"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Rom. 1:1-4.

As we have explained previously, it is as though Paul divides Jesus into two: according to the flesh, and according to the Spirit of holiness. We also experience this same duality in us, and this truth runs like a scarlet thread through the epistle to the Romans. "For when we were in the flesh . . . that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit . . . who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit" Etc.

We were taught as children that Jesus was true God and true man. Paul explains this in the following way: "Concerning His Son . . . who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh [here we see that He was truly man], and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead [here we see His true divinity]."

The conflict between God and man began at the fall. Man had received his *own* will and began to go his own way. God called him and worked with him to get him to be obedient, but at best His success was only partial. Therefore He sent His Son as the Son of Man. John 5:27. The decisive conflict between God and man began in Jesus; God was completely victorious, and the "man" was put to death. This took place because Jesus, as the Son of Man, said, "Not My will, but Yours, be done." Luke 22:42. Paul expresses it in this way: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Rom. 6:6. This is the "gospel concerning His Son"—the good news to mankind: that Jesus has put to death our old man. Now we no longer need to serve sin.

Paul calls this death over the flesh (our human nature) "the dying of the Lord Jesus." Paul always bore this dying in his body so that the life of Jesus also might be manifested in his body. "For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." 2 Cor. 4:10-12.

This is Christ manifested in the flesh; but this could not take place in us before it had taken place in Jesus. Paul was not the first one to overcome the natural man (the flesh: anger, a bad temper, self-love, etc.), because then it would have been the dying of Paul, and he would have been the foundation of our faith. Neither was it Peter or Luther; it was Jesus. He is the foundation of our faith. He is the One who brought us redemption by death to our human nature, thus making it possible for the good news to be proclaimed to us.

"Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? —'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.'" Is. 63:1-8.

There is no doubt that in this passage the prophet is referring to Jesus. Edom is Esau, who represents the flesh. Gen. 25:30. Who is this who comes up from Edom—the flesh—traveling in the greatness of His strength? This was unheard of. No one had ever come up out of Edom before. On the contrary, all those who had come in the flesh had remained in the flesh. It was amazing that someone came up out of the flesh.

It was Jesus who came up out of the flesh—He who is mighty to save. "Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? 'I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come.'"

Here we see the conflict Jesus had in the days of His flesh—a conflict with the peoples of Edom. These were the peoples whom He trod down in His anger and whose blood He let run down to the ground. These peoples were: Anger—"Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return"; Vengeance—"When He suffered, He did not threaten"; Lying—"Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; Hate—He loved His enemies, etc. He overcame these peoples and put them to death. This was not a make-believe conflict. The apostle puts it like this: "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear" Heb. 5:7.

Man had been given the law, but it was powerless against these enemies—the flesh. Therefore God had to send His Son, and then these enemies were defeated. Now God had gained control. The apostle says: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3.

He did this work for our sake. Jesus was with the Father; He did not need redemption. But we were in the flesh—in Edom—overcome by all these peoples. No one had ever come up from Edom, but now God had sent His Son there—a Savior—to bring us an eternal redemption. The apostle says further: "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Verse 4.

Now the message is: "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you." Verse 9. We have been liberated from Edom if we truly have the Spirit of Christ. It was in this Spirit that all of these peoples were conquered, and it is only when this Spirit dwells in us that we can overcome and be liberated from them. Then there will be an end to all that is of the flesh—the natural man.

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able." 1 Cor. 3:1-2. It doesn't take much before those who are in the flesh are upset and offended. As soon as the Word comes, they think it is a hard message and a judging spirit.

"For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" Verses 3-4.

Does this mean, then, that we are no longer to be "mere men"? Exactly! Our human nature received its death sentence in Jesus, and now God is to be in control. Now this Word is addressed to us: "But you, O man of God, flee these things." 1 Tim. 6:11. Now Christ is to be manifested in the flesh.

"Are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men" when you don't want to attend a function because your clothes are not nice enough, or you cannot invite "him" to your home because your home is not "fine" enough, and the food you serve is not as "fancy" as you would like? You cannot testify because you are not a gifted speaker. "I like him so much because he is so pleasant to

listen to! It was so nice being there. Isn't she sweet? I guess I will go to the conference because it is supposed to be so beautiful there. It would be pleasant to take a nice trip!"

Can you hear that such people are carnal and behave like mere men? Those who are in Christ Jesus stop behaving like this. "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Cor. 5:17.

Who is this Peter who used to be so afraid, but now has become so bold? Who is this Paul who breathed threats and murder against the saints, but now is an example to all those who believe in Jesus? Who is this Hansen who used to be so angry and miserly, but now has become like a lamb and is so generous? And what about Olsen? He was so envious and liked to lord it over the others, and because he was not elected as chairman, he stayed home and sulked. But now he has become the servant and slave of all and seeks everyone else's best? And Iversen! He loved to preach, but now he is so short and to the point and is so blessed to hear. "'Surely they are My people, children who will not lie.' So He became their Savior." Is. 63:8.

People are not used to such transformation. They are amazed when they see who is able to come up from Edom. Jesus is not ashamed to call them brethren, for both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one. "And again, 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.'" Heb. 2:11-13.

These are people who have surrendered themselves into the death of Christ and who are led by the Spirit of God. There is no guile in their spirit. They do not defend Esau and hide him when they are in a tight spot.

"But I have made Esau bare; I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself. His descendants are plundered, his brethren and his neighbors, and he is no more." Jer. 49:10.

The ungodly cannot remain in the congregation of the righteous. If someone comes in who is in the flesh—an Esau—he is laid bare. If he attempts to hide behind a humble demeanor or under grace and the blood, he is uncovered. The light of the Spirit uncovers him. It does not help if he cries out, "Judge not!" The sword of the Spirit brings him to nothing—together with his brothers and neighbors. If there is guile in *your* spirit (if you take sides with Esau), it is not surprising that you take to your heels and look for another place. Jesus will not be your Savior.

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself

likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." Heb. 2:14. "For indeed, He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham." Verse 16.

This is how Jesus destroyed the devil, and this is how the works of the flesh are destroyed in us as well. That is why Jesus is able to be manifested in flesh, not only once, two thousand years ago, but again and again throughout the centuries, much to the displeasure of the devil. The devil realized this and tried to take His life through his faithful servant Herod. From that day on he was always out to take His life until the day he managed to kill Him on the cross. But he had miscalculated. By then Jesus had finished the slaughter in Bozrah, the enemy had been conquered, and He won redemption. Jesus was offered as a spotless Lamb, the Just for the unjust. By His blood we are redeemed from our evil ways, we who were "carnal, sold under sin." Rom. 7:14.

The wages of sin is death. If Jesus had sinned—if He had walked as a "mere man"—the grave would have been able to hold Him; but death could not hold Him! God be praised! He has been "declared to be the Son of God with power." He opened up Paradise and took the thief with Him. He entered the Most Holy Place in the heavens with His own blood and obtained an eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:11-12), "now to appear in the presence of God for us." Verse 24. There He lives to make intercession for us. Heb. 7:25. He can save us to the uttermost from Edom. He watches over us with care and prays for us. Jesus consecrated a new and living way for us. The old way—making the flesh keep the law—was impossible; but the new way—death to the flesh—leads into the Holy of Holies.

Many have gone this way since then. Paul was a faithful follower, and he exhorts us to follow him as he followed Christ. May there be many of us in whom there is no guile, who faithfully follow Jesus from Edom into the Holy of Holies.

And so Satan has lost forever. Hallelujah! He had overcome all those who had come in the flesh, and when God sent His Son in the flesh, Satan reckoned that he would overcome Him as well. First he wanted to kill Jesus before He could accomplish His work. When this did not succeed, he tried to tempt Him with all the glory that was in Edom, hoping to ensnare Him and cause Him to sin, but he failed with every attempt. He was powerless to prevent God's victory over the natural man, and thus he lost his hold over man. God became man, and man became God. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Since then the devil has not been able to prevent Christ from coming in the flesh. He has not

managed to get rid of Him. Jesus continued to live in the apostles and all the saints throughout the ages. The devil musters his forces and leads astray those who are in the flesh, but ever since Jesus' work was finished, the devil has met many whom he could not defeat. He has been destroyed.

Jesus has wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us by nailing it to the cross. As a result, we can receive forgiveness for our sins. Jesus redeemed us by His blood; but not only that, He "disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them on the cross." (Norw.) Col. 2:14-15.

This is why we can boldly proclaim victory over sin just as boldly as we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus was here on earth, they crucified Him because He said He was the Son of God. It was vital for Satan to keep the great gift of God hidden. When Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus answered, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Matt. 16:16-17. Who would ever reveal the one who has conquered him? No. The flesh tried as well as it could to hide this, but now it is no longer possible to explain away the fact that God's Son came down to earth and lived here. However, now they say that He didn't come in the flesh like us, but only in a likeness, that He came like Adam before the fall, as if it were written like this: "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His *brother!*" But God be praised, it is written, "Like His *brethren!*" Therefore there is hope for us all. Heb. 2:17. "Yes," you say, "but it says, 'likeness.'" Yes, "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Nevertheless, it says very clearly that sin was condemned in the flesh. The point is that the flesh does not become *sinful* if one does not live according to one's lusts. We have sinful flesh because we have lived in sin, but sin was condemned in Jesus' flesh. Therefore we read, "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Rom. 8:3.

We are told that our sin was laid upon Jesus as He hung on the cross, in the same way that the high priest laid his hands on the goat. "Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness." Lev. 16:21-22.

By this sacrifice they received forgiveness for their sins. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." Heb. 10:4. They were only reminded of their sins. Verse 3. This is understandable,

because the goat had never overcome any of these sins; it merely bore them into the wilderness. This points to Jesus who is the perfect sacrifice. He not only bore our sins on the cross by dying, He overcame them by His life. Therefore John the Baptist could say of Him when he baptized Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29.

Most people make the blood of Jesus to be no more than the blood of bulls and goats whereby they receive forgiveness for their sins; they reckon that when they die, they will cease from sin. But this is not the case. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Heb. 9:14. It is now, in this present world, that we are to serve God, not after we die.

"For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:17.

What the fall had destroyed has now been restored. To live and reign with Jesus Christ—this is the message that must be proclaimed with power. Now we shall live a life—not in sin and grace, but in grace and victory.

Works

Now we can understand why religious people do not want to hear about works. They live in the spirit of the old covenant, and they see Jesus' sacrifice as no more than liberation from the guilt of sin. In other words, they live in the shadow. They do not have a body; and since they have no body, they can do no works.

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect." Heb. 10:1.

The shadow shows us the form of the body, and the law shows us the form of Jesus. Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets. He came with the body that cast the shadow. Col. 2:17.

"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God."' Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second." Heb. 10: 1-9.

This verse shows us that Jesus did away with the offerings, and with His body He established the doing of God's will. This is what God desired. A body that had done all God's will had never lived on earth before. Never before had sin been condemned in the flesh; on the contrary, sin had gained control of people's bodies so that they had to make sacrifices for their sins. This was not so with Jesus. He never sinned, for sin was condemned in the flesh. Rom. 8:3. He established the doing of God's will not only for His own sake but for us all.

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." 1 Cor. 12:13-27.

Now we no longer live in the shadow, but in the very body that casts the shadow. Now the requirements of the law can also be fulfilled in us who do not

walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Rom. 8:4. This is why we can speak so much about works, because now we have a body with which to do them. And because we have received the Spirit of Christ, sin is also put to death in our flesh. Then we become one flesh with Him (Eph. 5:30-32), and the life of Jesus is revealed through our mortal flesh. 2 Cor. 4:11. Now the parable of Jesus as the Vine and we as the branches can be fulfilled. How could we possibly be branches in Jesus if He had had the flesh of an angel, or some other kind of flesh that was unlike ours? It is indeed the same flesh, but it is a crucified flesh—a flesh in which sin is condemned, so that we can bear much fruit for God.

This is a great mystery, and if you cannot comprehend it, you must just be content to let it be. 1 Cor. 14:38. But thanks be to God who has taken the veil from our eyes so that we have been able to see Jesus manifested in the flesh. And you can rest assured that flesh and blood has not revealed this to us, but the Spirit of Christ.

Joel's Prophecy

"But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh . . .'" Acts 2:16-18.

Why could God not allow this prophecy to be fulfilled before the day of Pentecost? Because the flesh had not been sacrificed before that time. In the old covenant, the sacrifice had to be killed and laid on the altar before God answered with fire. This sacrifice was now fulfilled in Jesus. The slaughter in Edom was complete. Esau, the flesh, was sacrificed. The entire seed of David was represented in this sacrifice; it included both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus reconciled them both in one body to God by the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Eph. 2:14-18.

All flesh was represented in Jesus' sacrifice; therefore, God could pour out His Spirit on all flesh. He showed his acceptance of the sacrifice by answering with fire on the day of Pentecost. There is no partiality—Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, all have access to the Father by one Spirit. According to the flesh, the Jews had an advantage; they had the law, the prophets, and the circumcision. Yet it became apparent that not even they could keep the law in the power of the flesh. This was dealt with in Jesus' sacrifice when He became a curse for us that we might receive the promised Holy Spirit. Gal. 3:13-14. Now for the Jews, Gentiles, and bondsmen alike, there is only one way to gain access to God. All must enter through the one Spirit.

We meet people today also who believe they have some advantage according to the flesh. They believe that their theological studies or their worldly wisdom gives them some special access to God—some special ability to understand the kingdom of God. But they have clearly demonstrated the opposite through the years. Which of the prophets have they not killed? Just think of Hans Nielsen Hauge. ^[5] And which revival have they not resisted? There are also people who are

very bold in the assembly just because they have a bit of money, a professional standing, or are gifted. But you need to realize that none of these things will give you any access to the Father.

"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. . . . If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Cor. 5:16-17.

Stop boasting about what you are according to the flesh, about your family and their high position in society. They are altogether accursed according to the flesh; and if any of them want to become wise, they must first become fools. 1 Cor. 3:18-21. It is through this Spirit and this Spirit alone that all of us have access to the Father, and with Him there is no respect of persons.

Come to Me

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11:28.

There were many God-fearing people in the old covenant who strove to keep the law, but the commandments were a heavy burden. Jesus says, "Come to Me!" The 120 who were waiting in the upper room on the day of Pentecost were such people. They were waiting for power from above, for the Spirit that had been promised. They had come to Jesus; they had forsaken everything, and they hated their own lives; their sacrifice was laid on the altar. And God answered with fire. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. Now the commandments were no longer burdensome. 1 John 5:3.

Now it was possible for them to be led by the Spirit, but since the Spirit resists the flesh, there had to be a sacrifice. The fire had plenty to do. The revival spread. The 120 were not the only ones striving to keep the law. "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." When Peter spoke to them, they gladly received his word and were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. Acts 2:5, 41. This was really a day of sacrifice.

Ungodly people want to make a good appearance according to the flesh. They do all they can to make a good show. Yet there are a few who get tired of this, and they begin to hate their own life. They try to improve themselves, but all this striving just weighs them down. Then they are receptive for this message: "Come to Me!" Then they are at the point where the 120 were, and they are ripe for a Pentecost. It is meaningless to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit without having this need, because the fire only falls where there is a sacrifice.

Many people have sincerely sought God and have been baptized with the Spirit, but then they think that they have reached the ultimate goal of their faith. They think they have become better than others. The Spirit is on the offensive against the flesh, but they are not willing to sacrifice. They defend the flesh and boast of their experiences. The Spirit then forsakes them. The intention was that the Spirit could give them the power to put the things they hated to death—to endure the consuming fire. But when all is said and done, it is evident that they

are not willing to suffer, and the Spirit forsakes them. There are many Spirit-forsaken souls today. They speak zealously about the baptism of the Spirit, but in the midst of it all, they want to be something according to the flesh, and they exalt themselves.

However, there is something even worse. When such people realize that the Spirit has forsaken them, they try to yield to Him anew without giving up what He has pointed out in their lives. If that is your case, you should know that many spirits would be happy to fill you. Eph. 2:2; 6:12. And in your striving after feelings—enjoyment without sacrifice—you will become possessed by evil spirits who come to you as angels of light. Lying spirits will fill you because you are not willing to receive the truth. These spirits are just looking for a body to dwell in, and all the while you believe that you are experiencing God.

We find many such people who are possessed by a spirit of vanity, domination of others, greed, envy, the lust to preach, the love of money, etc. It is useless to say anything to them because they think they have come out of bondage into the liberty of Christ! They think they are crucified, buried with Him, and raised up again! Everything is in order; nothing remains but to shout, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!"

It is not difficult to understand that such people have come down from the cross. If they were ever buried, it is easy enough to see that they have come up again. We are admonished "not to believe every spirit." "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. . . ." 1 John 4:2.

The Ten Virgins

(Matthew 25)

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

The five foolish virgins do not represent the world and neither do they represent the religious world—the harlot—because they are virgins. This is why we find them in the church together with the wise virgins. They were all virgins; their hearts were closed to the world. They all went out to meet the bridegroom. They had said goodbye to the world in order to seek the things that are above, where Jesus is. Col. 3:1-2. They all took their lamps with them. The lamps represent our confession of faith.

"Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops." Matt. 10:27. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." Matt. 5:15.

They had fellowship in the doctrine. There was only one difference between them: the wise virgins took oil in their vessels together with their lamps; the foolish virgins did not realize that they had to take oil in their vessels.

"Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually." Lev. 24:2.

Our lamps cannot shine without oil, and to obtain oil, something has to be crushed. We need to have works if our confession of faith is to shine. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Matt. 5:16.

The thing that is lacking so desperately is lamps that can shine brightly in life and teaching. If my confession of faith is that I am to walk in Jesus' footsteps "Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return," my lamp will not shine if I revile in return. But in order for me not to revile in return, something within me has to be crushed—my self-will, my honor. If it is crushed, the lamp will shine. The five foolish virgins did have some oil in their lamps, because they

said, "Our lamps are going out." So something must have been crushed in them as well.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like." Gal. 5:19-21.

These and similar works are manifest. Everyone knows that they are sin. If we do such things, it is not easy for others to believe in our Christianity. No matter how beautiful our lamps look, they will not shine. These things must be put off if we are to be considered to be Christians. All ten virgins had crushed sufficient olives so that they were virgins. However, the five wise virgins thought not only about letting their lamps shine in the present moment, they also thought about their vessels.

These works of the flesh will become apparent in the various trials of daily life when we are together with other people. It is then that our lamps must shine. Even the five foolish virgins will deny themselves in these trials, so that their lamps shine and people cannot judge them. But then they are satisfied. It doesn't occur to them that the little drop of oil they received at that moment is also burned up in the same instant. True enough, their lamps shone for the people, but afterwards they were just as empty as before. The wise virgins, on the other hand, thought about gathering oil in their vessels. Their lamps also shone for the people, but this did not satisfy them. When the trial was over, they reflected on what they had done. In quietness before God's face, they were able to see themselves, their human nature, and they crushed it. They had no need for their lamps now because there was no one to shine for. The oil they received from this crushing went into their vessels. This is the hidden life with Christ in God.

The foolish virgins are satisfied when they have put off manifest sin; however Paul did not stop there. He said, "For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." 1 Cor. 4:4.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Gal. 5:25. You cannot live in the Spirit and lose your temper at the same time. If you lose your temper, you cannot say that you know nothing against yourself. On the contrary, you have a guilty conscience. Your lamp is not shining; other people can see that there is something wrong with you. It was not enough for Paul that the Galatians lived in the Spirit—that other people couldn't find anything to

judge in them. Not at all! Because he says, "Let us also walk in the Spirit." Walking in the Spirit is what gives depth to your life. Even if the others cannot judge you, and even if you do not know anything against yourself, you may rest assured that the Lord is able to judge you. It is by walking in the Spirit when the Lord begins to judge you that you begin to gather oil in your vessel.

This is where the attitude of the foolish virgins is revealed. They are satisfied that people cannot judge them. Then they are bold. They see no value in being quiet before God's face. They consider that to be laziness and indifference. They can also be zealous to spread the gospel and travel around with their lamps. You can find them at meetings, in hospitals or retirement homes, or visiting people here and there. They believe they have a ministry wherever they go. If they are out traveling, they feel like they have to be talking or singing. They always feel compelled to be busy. Rest and quietness before God? No, they have to be doing something. Truly they are like Martha. In her zeal, she served Jesus, but she was soulish. She could not understand Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and gathered oil in her vessel.

Putting off sin that burdens our conscience gives us oil in our lamp, but putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit gives us oil in our vessel. Col. 3:8; Rom. 8:13. Vanity, honor-seeking, preacher's itch, respect of persons and stinginess, all of which are things that people can see, must be put off and crushed if our lamp is to give light. The five foolish virgins are content with this. They are full and rich; they reign as kings. 1 Cor. 4:8. The one who is satisfied with his spiritual condition such as it is becomes one of the foolish virgins. But the Spirit searches much deeper. If you want to have oil in your vessel, you must come to rest in your inner being so that you can hear the Spirit's voice. There He will give you light and show you a much deeper degree of your vanity, vainglory, lust to preach, etc., than you ever could have imagined. This is why it is vital to walk in the Spirit, to acknowledge what He shows you, and to crush it. The five wise virgins see the value for this "vessel life"; they love it, and they get oil in their lamps *and* in their vessels.

We can learn something about this from the letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. Rev. 2:1-6. "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its

place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

There was nothing but good to say about the works of the angel of the church in Ephesus. Nevertheless, he was on the verge of becoming one of the five foolish virgins. He had to repent. He had lost his first love. Only in this first love is our fellowship and communion with God and His leading perfect. The first works in the first love are done for Jesus' sake, for Him alone. This was the intimate fellowship that Jesus required of Peter before He entrusted him with the ministry of a shepherd. "Do you love Me more than these?" The angel of the church in Ephesus had drifted away from this first love. He had to repent. It was not just a difference in degree, with room for improvement. No, there was an *essential* difference. Though the works were outwardly in order, their quality was poor.

In Revelation 3:1 we read what Jesus says to the angel of the church in Sardis: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." You have to do something to receive a name. The angel of the church in Sardis had the name of being alive. He got that name because he was very active and his works were very good; yet he was dead. He had lost his connection with Jesus. He did his works before the face of man. Oh, how many there are who, in their zeal for the cause of Christ, have lost their connection with Him. They seek their own and live only a "lamp-life." Phil. 2:21. They want to have a name that they are alive. That is what motivates them to testify and pray and strive to get people to be converted, and that is why they are generous and self-sacrificing. This angel seemed to be a good worker in God's vineyard, but listen to the exhortation he received: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." Rev. 3:2.

Paul exhorts us not to become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Gal. 5:26. In his striving to receive a name of being alive, the angel in Sardis had drawn the others into the same race for honor. Such a race is outside the leading of the Spirit and ends in death. He was held accountable for the others as well.

"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." The garments, which are the clean and bright linen, are the righteous acts of the saints. These few in Sardis had not defiled their garments. They had overcome their lust for honor. They did all their works for God alone. The most important thing for

them was to be led by the Spirit. It was the love of Christ that compelled them. They did not allow themselves to be drawn into the race leading to death that the leader and others in the church had entered into.

"He who overcomes!" There are great promises for him. To overcome: that means not doing your works to be seen, but because you love Jesus, and everything you do is for His sake. If you do this, you are truly wise. Then you will be raptured when Jesus comes like a thief to fetch those who are ready. You will be clothed in white garments and be allowed to walk with Jesus, and He will confess your name before the Father and His angels. But the angel of Sardis and the others in the church there will be left behind if they do not repent. They had become foolish virgins. Rev. 3:1-5.

"Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord lazily." Jer. 48:10. (Norw.) This was the state of the angel of the church in Laodicea. He was neither cold nor hot. That is why Jesus was about to spew him out of His mouth. When we read this, we must ask ourselves, "Was he not a hypocrite?" A conscious hypocrite knows what he is doing, but this angel had deceived himself. "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and *do not know* that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Rev. 3:17. (Emphasis added.) This is how it can go with us if we are not faithful in the depths of our hearts and do not walk only before God's face. We can be certain that all of them believed in the atonement, but that was no longer the issue. In order for us to be of the firstfruits, our works must be perfect, because they will be our wedding garment. It is not sufficient for the works to be good in themselves, but they must be carried out in a zeal for the Lord. Tit. 2:14.

People can only see our lamp. They cannot see the vessel, because it is hidden in a cupboard. They cannot distinguish between the virgins, although they can see that some of the lamps have less oil and don't shine as brightly.

"But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept." Matt. 25:5. On this point they were all alike, and they are not reproached for having slept. Therefore, the fact that they slept does not mean that they had fallen away or had become lukewarm, but it can mean that a time will come when they cannot work. "The night is coming when no one can work." John 9:4. They could not use their lamps (for example, they could not hold public meetings). They were forced to keep quiet. It will be as we read in Revelation 22:11-12: "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. 'And behold, I am coming quickly.'"

"And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'" Matt. 25:6. Then they all awoke. Suddenly they needed their lamps. This call went out to the virgins in the darkness, and they all had ears to hear that call. The time had come for them to preach it from the rooftops, in the light. They trimmed their lamps.

"Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help." Dan. 11:34. In the deepest night God can send a little help, an opportunity even in great trial to preach the Word and have revival. They trimmed their lamps, but for them to burn brightly in the midnight hour, more oil was needed than what was already in their lamps. It was then that the foolish virgins made the terrible discovery that their lamps were going out. Their words did not have enough weight to break through the darkness—the spirit powers of evil that prevailed. They were too shallow. They lacked a deeper understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Suddenly it dawned on them what it was that they had neglected, and they tried to get oil from the wise virgins. They were unable to stand alone in the conflict, and they wanted help. But the wise virgins only had enough for themselves. They didn't have enough to supply the foolish virgins. The foolish virgins had to go out to the sellers—they had to live the life—take the time to crush the olives so that their words could have the necessary weight and power.

Life is the light of men; no one can borrow light from another. Today, too, there are people who live in sin but try to hide among the Christians. People trust them because they attend the meetings, and they seem to be good people. But the time is coming when they will be manifested for what they really are.

When some people speak, we can hear that they have received something from God. Their lamps shine as a blessing to others. But then they feel that what God has given them to say is not enough, so they continue speaking from the development of their own thoughts and reasonings. Then we see that their lamps are beginning to smoke.

When the cry went up, it was too late to buy oil. The bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with Him. "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'" Matt. 25:11-12.

They had walked before the face of man and had not considered what the bridegroom had to say. He could not speak to them the way He did to Mary. He did not know them.

The foolish virgins were left behind in the great tribulation. The night becomes cold and hard when it is past midnight. So may all of us wake up and

be more conscious of gathering oil in our vessels. Then we will be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man. Luke 21:36.

Antichrist—The False Prophet

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.'" Luke 4:5-7.

"Antichrist" means "against Christ." Satan tried to keep Jesus from becoming Christ—God's anointed. Instead, he tried to make Him Antichrist by getting Him to worship him.

The devil was unsuccessful in doing this, so he had to try a different approach. He too had to produce a son, just as God had manifested His Son. But Jesus' work was so powerful that the devil could not reveal his son right away. Just as the wolves dared not reveal themselves while Paul was still alive, the Antichrist could not be revealed until Christ had left this earth. Therefore, the devil had to begin working through his spirit—the spirit of Antichrist—to prepare the people. As we have already seen, this spirit has been active through the harlot since the days of the apostles. But there are still those who restrain him so that he cannot be revealed. And when they (the salt which has power) are taken away, then he can be revealed.

We have already seen that the beast rises out of the sea. Through the harlot, the devil has managed to make Christianity powerless so that people no longer have faith in it, and thus the devil has prepared the way for the beast. Just as the beast rises up out of the sea, so the Antichrist (the false prophet) rises up out of the earth—the body of the beast.

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." Rev. 13:11-13.

This beast had horns like a lamb. In other words, it resembled the Lamb, though it spoke like a dragon. This is the false prophet. Rev. 19:20. This is the prophet of the beast, and now the beast can really make progress. His coming

is "according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders." 2 Thess. 2:9.

The beast is manifested through the powerful activity of Satan. Afterwards, the false prophet arises from the beast. By means of its politics the beast is able to accomplish many good things for the people—things that "Christianity" was not able to accomplish because it has been corrupted by the spirit of Antichrist. "Christianity" has only been a confession without works. Now the beast is coming with "christianity in practice"—but no confession of faith, and the false prophet comes along and says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven." Who is it then, who will enter in? Those who do God's will. Just look at the "Christian" nations and see how they exploit one another and gather to themselves. They say, "Lord, Lord," but they seek their own. Doesn't Christianity mean sharing with one another? God does not ask whether you have gone to church regularly or have prayed many prayers. Not at all! The requirement is much more basic than that. Jesus said it in simple, straightforward words: "I was hungry." What have you done about that? "I was sick." What have you done about that? Look what our politics have achieved. We have done God's will. The sick have free medical care and hospitalization with full pay. Everybody has work, food, and clothing. This is Christianity!

As we can hear, the prophet speaks like a dragon. He offers all the glories of the earth just as Satan did to Jesus. By his powerful work, Satan has led people into one ditch by getting them to say, "Lord, Lord" without doing His will. Now the false prophet comes along and reveals this deception and then he leads them into the other ditch of doing "His will" without confessing Him as "Lord, Lord." This is how the Antichrist has removed Christ.

People have fallen away from God. They worship themselves. They have created their own heaven without help from God. They have produced salvation by their own hammer which they have lifted up together.

This backlash is a consequence of false Christianity, because by confessing Jesus and not doing His will, people have, in fact, removed Him, and Satan is just waiting for the moment when he can remove the name "Jesus" as well.

Now they no longer need a redeemer or one who mediates for them. They have advanced so far that they can carry out "righteousness" and have created heaven on earth. The false prophet can perform incredible signs and wonders, and the people will believe a lie. They will not receive a love for the truth so they might be saved. They have no interest in using the cross in their daily life

—that dying to themselves that brings transformation. They don't want to hear that they themselves are evil. They blamed society for everything. The beast has remade society so that everybody has equal rights. When Jesus spoke, He came with the cross. First the sacrifice and then the glory. But the false prophet offers glory without the cross and sacrifice. All those who do not want to acknowledge their own folly believe the false prophet. "That they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thess. 2:12.

Jesus says that He is the *true* vine. By contrast, the Antichrist is also a vine that has many branches, yet he is a false vine, an earthly vine. It will be a terrible day when it is harvested. Rev. 14:18-20.

The fruits of these two vines can be very similar and many people cannot tell the difference. They allow themselves to be deceived by this "christianity in practice" which does not say "Lord, Lord," because they love the glory of this world. Many people today find comfort in their charitable and social work without being converted to God. You can hear mothers say about their children, "They do so much good; they live just like Christians. In fact, they are even better than many of them. The only thing they lack is repentance." As if repentance were just an "only." The fact is, it is *everything!* Otherwise they are a branch on the earthly vine—a branch of Antichrist.

The Rapture

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thess. 4:15-18.

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." 1 Thess. 5:1-2.

The apostle says that we do not need to know the time and the season, because He will come as a thief in the night. But this would seem to be a good reason for wanting to know when He will return, and many people have devoted themselves to figuring it out. They have calculated and recalculated to stir people up and get revivals going. But they have always been wrong and always will be. Jesus Himself says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." Matt. 24:36. We read that the day will come as a thief. But Jesus is not a thief. He will only take those who belong to Him. Therefore that day will not come upon us as a thief.

It's not just in our day that they try to frighten people with the day of the Lord. Paul also warned against this and said, "not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come." 2 Thess. 2:2. It is strange that they should be frightened by hearing that the day of the Lord had already come. But when we read the first verse, the matter becomes clear. "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." This is the rapture. "The Day of the Lord" is the day when He will come as Lord and consume the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth and take dominion for a thousand years. If the day of the Lord had come, that would mean they had not been included in the gathering together with Jesus. So it wasn't strange that they were frightened when they heard that the day of the Lord had come. But to hear about the rapture—our gathering together with Him—is not a frightening thing for those who are ready. On the contrary. We should comfort one another with these

words. 1 Thess. 4:18.

Paul goes on to explain that certain things must take place before the rapture. People have been saying for years now that everything has been fulfilled and that Jesus could come at any time. If that had been true, Jesus would already have come. But since He has not come, we know that everything has not been fulfilled. For one thing, "the man of sin" has not yet been revealed—the one whom Jesus will consume with the breath of His mouth on the "Day of the Lord."

"For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thess. 5:3-6.

Here we read that the day will not overtake us as a thief. This is not because we know the time or the season, but because we are children of the light. We are ready to receive Him, so the thief can come whenever he wants; He will not take us by surprise. As the day approaches, God will give those of us who are ready a sense in our spirit, a witness that the day is near. We learn this from the parable of the ten virgins. They had an opportunity to make themselves ready. Because they were virgins and pure, they belonged to the day; that's why they knew the Bridegroom was coming, and they heard the cry to go out and meet Him. Yet even among these there were some who were not raptured.

We see that when Jesus came to earth the first time—when He was born in Bethlehem—it was revealed to the shepherds in the fields. But the scribes, who were supposed to understand these things, knew nothing at all. Simeon and Anna were in the temple when Jesus was brought in. They understood who He was. This is how it will be at His second coming. That is why it is written, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Then the day will not overtake you as a thief, whenever it comes.

Even if the day of the rapture is not yet that close at hand that the cry goes up, Jesus has given us various signs so we can rejoice. He says, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" Matt. 24:32-33.

The fig tree is the Jewish people, and all the other trees are the Gentiles. Luke 21:29. There will be war, pestilence, and terror. Jesus has told us that this must

be so. Then we must lift up our heads, for our redemption is drawing near. Let us consider the fig tree and see how it buds. It is the clearest sign we have.

"Thus says the Lord God: '*When* I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and am hallowed in them in the sight of the Gentiles, then they will dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will dwell safely there, build houses, and plant vineyards; yes, they will dwell securely, when I execute judgments on all those around them who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God.'" Ezek. 28:25-26.

This tells us that when God judges the nations, Israel will dwell safely in their land. But the Jews will have to endure much tribulation before they settle down there. [\[6\]](#)

"For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, 'The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.' On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old." Amos 9:9-11.

We have seen this being fulfilled in our days; so we know that the time is near for the restoration of the tabernacle of David, which had fallen down. When the prophet saw the dead bones in the valley and prophesied that they should live, there was a loud noise and a rattling, and the bones came together. Ezek. 37:7. Since the "rattling" of World War II, the Jews have come closer together. Their graves have been opened. They were buried in their big businesses and the positions that they would not forsake; but now they are coming out of their graves.

"Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel."' Verse 12.

All this happens during times of war, famine, earthquakes, and turmoil. In one sense we can say that the wrath of God is already poured out over mankind, but this is not *the wrath—the final judgment. That will only be poured out after the Jews are gathered in their land. They will dwell there in safety while God judges all the nations around them, just as He did when they dwelt in Goshen and the plagues swept over the Egyptians.* Is. 26:20-21.

"And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people

dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land. I will make a difference between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be." Ex. 8:22-23 and 10:23.

Then the prophesy of Isaiah will be fulfilled. "For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you." Is. 60:2. Read also Psalm 91. Then Israel dwells in the secret place of the Most High and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked." Verses 7-8.

This refers to the earthly Israel, but it also applies to the spiritual Israel, those who are Jews inwardly, and whose circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit. Rom. 2:29. When God gathers the earthly Jewish nation in Palestine, He will also gather the bride and rapture her in the clouds, forever to be with her Lord. We have already seen in Revelation 14 that the 144,000 are standing on Mount Zion together with the Lamb and are singing a new song when the angel comes and proclaims that the hour of God's judgment has arrived. Paul said, "Comfort one another with these words." It is truly a comfort in tribulations, in temptations, and when we have to bear His reproach to know that we will be saved from God's judgment, His wrath, and the great tribulation. Paul says that we must put on the hope of salvation as a helmet. "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9. Just look at the following scriptures that clearly tell us that we will be saved from wrath.

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience." Read Colossians 3:56 and Ephesians 5:3-6.

This is a warning for us to abstain from "these things." If we do that, we will also be saved from wrath.

"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." Eph. 2:3. "Children of wrath" are those people for whom God's wrath has been determined. They are the ones who walk according to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We were once among them, but we are not among them any more. Don't you believe, then, that God will deliver us from the wrath to come?

"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." Rom. 5:9. Just as Noah was saved from the flood by the ark, so we will be saved from wrath by Jesus. He will rapture us. He saved Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." Read 2 Peter 2:4-9.

I can comfort you with many words, you who are waiting for the Lord and are purifying yourself just as He is pure. Many people ask, "Are we not going to experience some tribulation?" There have always been tribulations. However, you must understand that persecution of Christians and tribulations in general are not the wrath of God, which has only been reserved for the ungodly. These things are a melting pot in which He purifies the gold, and we are to rejoice over it. 1 Pet. 4:12-16. God's punishment has always been over the ungodly, and the God-fearing have had to suffer together with them even though God has kept His hand over them. None of us have been the salt and light we should have been. Therefore, even if we are not directly guilty of sin and ungodliness, we are indirectly guilty. Therefore it is only reasonable that we should taste a portion of the punishment.

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Matt. 24:6. All these things will take place so that the Jews are shaken and gathered together and arise from their graves and go to their land. We have already seen it and will see it even more, and it will not be a particularly pleasant time for us. "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Luke 21:24.

We will experience all this and feel the pressure of the beast's development—the beginning of the sorrows. In other words, we must go through this first half of the night, and with the help of the fig tree, we can carefully follow how far the night has come. Once Jerusalem has been liberated and the Jews are gathered there, the time for our liberation will also have come. Listen to what Bevin, [\[7\]](#) the British Foreign Minister said at a press conference on November 13, 1945: "I will stake my political reputation on finding a solution to the Palestine problem. My one great dream is to give the Jews democratic freedom." This is the sign of the times for us who are waiting for the Lord, and we should take heed to it as a comfort and joy.

The Firstfruits

The rapture is the harvest of the firstfruits. "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." Read James 1:18 and Rev. 14:4. The firstfruits are spared the dark nights and severe storms of autumn. The firstfruits are the finest fruits. Actually it is Jesus who is the firstfruits. "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." 1 Cor. 15:23.

This agrees with the pattern we have in the old covenant. "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'" Read Leviticus 23:10-17.

This was the Passover feast, and Jesus is the first sheaf, the firstfruits of God's plan of salvation. He consecrated the new way and is our Forerunner, having entered within the veil. He is the firstborn among many brethren. Rom. 8:29. "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." Heb. 1:5. Jesus was truly a wave offering. He was set free from the earth and people. He was waved before His Father's countenance.

The Jews were to count seven weeks from the Passover until Pentecost. Then they were to present to the Lord an offering of the new grain. "You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord." Lev. 23:16-17.

On the day of Pentecost, the 120 were in the upper room, and we can say that, in a manner of speaking, they were waved before the Lord. Just as the fine flour was a fruit of the sheaf, so these people were a fruit of Jesus' finished work. They were the firstfruits. However, the firstfruits will not be completely ripe until the rapture, because the fine flour was first to be baked with leaven making two wave loaves—the Jews and the Gentiles.

Leaven usually represents sin; but the kingdom of heaven is also likened to leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until it was all leavened. Matt. 13:33. The old leaven must be cleansed out so that we can

become a new lump of dough, because Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed. 1 Cor. 5:7-8. There could be no leaven in the house at the time of the Passover. "For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel." Ex. 12:15.

Jesus purged out the old leaven. In Him, God condemned sin in the flesh. Rom. 8:3. The old man was crucified with Him. The leaven, the manifestations of the old man, had to cease. A new era had begun. This is why the month Abib was to be the first month of the year for the Jews. Ex. 12:2. Now they had to eat unleavened bread for seven days, which is why Jesus said to the apostles, "But tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." Luke 24:49. They had to wait for the new leaven to work. The old leaven was cleansed out, and now they had to wait quietly in prayer until they received the promise. There they were on the day of Pentecost, and Jesus endued them with power from on high. They were filled with the new leaven—the Holy Spirit—and now they could begin to work. Now the flour could be baked with leaven until it was completely leavened. This applies to each individual's salvation as he partakes more and more of divine nature, as well as to all those who will be a part of the bride. When this work is finished, the day will come when those who have fallen asleep in Christ will arise first, and we who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the clouds. Then all three measures of flour—spirit, soul, and body—will be thoroughly leavened. 1 Thess. 5:23. They have become two wave loaves—free from the earth and from people—firstfruits for God and the Lamb.

This work is still not finished, which is why the Lord has not yet come. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us." "Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation," and let us hasten the coming of the day of the Lord by holy conduct and godliness. 2 Pet. 3:9-15.

The Dedication of the Priests

No one can be of the firstfruits unless he is completely separated. "And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to the Lord. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering. For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself." Num. 8:13-17.

God was exact concerning this matter of separation. They had to be a wave offering before the Lord, set free from everything; they had to be totally surrendered to the Lord. There are only a few who are willing to be completely separated. "But we have to be among people," others say. They want to go to sports events and to the theater, to say nothing of parties with friends and relatives so they can win them. But instead of winning them, they themselves become filled with the spirit of the world and high-mindedness. God cannot use them. They will never be among the firstfruits.

"'Whoever is on the Lord's side—come to me!' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, 'Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.'" Ex. 32:26-29.

This is an illustration of what Jesus said: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26.

In that hate (and here we have to be radical) lies death to family ties, friends, and even one's own life—death to everything human. Nothing less will do. We

cannot stand in the presence of the Lord if we are not totally separated. God consecrated all the firstborn in Israel on the day that He slew all the firstborn in Egypt. In order to be among the firstfruits, we must personally have experienced death to self. When we are completely separated, we are dead to the world but alive to God. You will not regret this separation on the day when one is taken and the other left behind. The separation does not begin on that day—it takes place before. Those who are taken will already have been separated. If they have not been separated, they will not be taken.

We need to have faith to go out, just like Abraham, not knowing where we are going. "Therefore, to you who believe, belongs the honor." People did not understand Jesus, and they do not understand us. If you wait to do God's will until your father, mother, brother, and sister understand it, and so avoid the reproach and unpleasantness, you will never be a priest. Jesus says that He came to bring conflict. From now on, two will be against three in one house. The sword must be used; nothing less will do. If you are afraid of the conflict, stay home. Your lot will be among the unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, adulterers, sorcerers, and idolaters, as well as all the liars. Their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. Rev. 21:8.

All the firstfruits belong to the Lord. Israel had to bring the first of their produce to the Lord. This teaches us that in everything we must seek God's kingdom and His glory first. If you do this, you yourself will be a firstfruits for God and the Lamb. You will be to the praise of His glory.

God's Judgment

"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'" Rev. 14:6-7.

Now the hour of God's judgment has come. We have already seen that where this takes place, the earthly Israel will have been gathered in Palestine, and the spiritual Jews—the bride of Christ—will have been raptured, standing on Mount Zion together with the Lamb. At this point in time, what has been restraining—the salt that has strength (Norw.)—has been removed, and the time has come for the salt that has lost its strength to be trodden underfoot.

The beast with seven heads and ten horns will have arisen, but it is still tame enough for the harlot to sit on its back. However, as soon as the bride is caught up, the harlot's time will be over. The next thing John saw was another angel following the first one, 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." Rev. 14:8.

The beast on which the harlot sat was scarlet and was full of blasphemous names. Rev. 17:3. The harlot should have had enough sense to jump off the beast of her own accord, but she undoubtedly thought she was doing a good work by trying to tame it. "We must not shirk our responsibility," she says. "We have to fulfill our responsibility to society. We must be actively engaged in every area of society in order to influence it with our Christian principles." And so she tries to "Christianize" films, the theater, sports, and whatever else she can. All this sounds so broad-minded and self-sacrificial, but the truth of the matter is that she wants to be great and have a name in this world. "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls." Rev. 17:4. She has been supported by the beast, but now the end has come. The beast will not be bound any more; it no longer wants to support these Babylonian businessmen, subsidizing their churches and paying their salaries.

"Then he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are

peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled." Rev. 17:15-17.

This will be a terrible time. This is the fate awaiting the five foolish virgins as well as those among God's people who are not obedient to the voice from heaven that says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." Rev. 18:4. This is God's judgment of the religious world and those who are not obedient to the voice from heaven.

From this point on, the beast will have free rein. Everyone will have to submit or be killed. And in order to control each individual, he will cause everyone, both great and small, rich and poor, slave and free, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their forehead so that no one can buy or sell except those who have the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name. Rev. 13:16-17.

And yet, by God's grace, even in these times a gospel will be preached, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." Rev. 14:7.

This will be exactly the message that is needed when everyone begins to worship the beast. The beast has brought prosperity to everyone, as we have already seen. It has managed to institute "Christianity in practice" without saying, "Lord, Lord." Should not all those who resist the beast be slain without mercy? "Of course," they will say. "All you have to do is receive the mark, and you will be fine." Antichrist—the false prophet, the man of sin—is a great orator. He will perform signs and wonders and deceive those who dwell on earth. Yet even now there will be a voice that cries out against the beast.

"Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'" Rev. 14:9-11.

It looks as if things will go very well for those who worship the beast, but the

angel says the opposite. What Peter wrote is still valid: "He who believes will receive the glory." 1 Pet. 2:7. (Norw.) The five foolish virgins woke up when the wise virgins were raptured. They went to buy oil but were too late for the wedding feast. These will understand what is going on because they have the knowledge of God and are able to hear the angel's voice. We must assume that some of them will not sell themselves just for bread. They will defy the beast and refuse to take his mark. Now their lamps will be burning, and many of God's people who had not left the harlot will undoubtedly join them. When it comes to the point of denying God's name and receiving the mark of the beast, some will say "No" and rather lay down their lives.

"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" Rev. 14:13.

These people must take a firm stand and separate themselves. They have died to the world, and now they must also lay down their lives for their faith. But praise God they die in the Lord! They rest from their labors. They would never have had rest if they had worshiped the beast. Now the beast begins the extermination of those saints who are left on the earth and who are obedient to the gospel of the angel.

"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped." Verses 14-16.

These are the secondfruits that will be gathered into God's storehouse. Even now this word applies: "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Matt. 10:29-30. Of course it is the beast that kills them, but He who held the sickle was like a Son of Man, and on His head was a golden crown. Just as when Stephen was being stoned, and the Son of Man stood at God's right hand watching what was taking place, so also now He watches over each individual who lays down his life for His name's sake.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." There is still a victor's prize to be won. "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." Heb. 12:12. "Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him." Verse 5. Take up the battle against the beast and the false prophet with

all your heart. It will win you the martyr's crown. Then you will be blessed and will enter into rest.

You may ask, "Doesn't receiving the mark of the beast apply to the time before the bride is raptured?" Yes, it has always been like that, but only after the rapture has taken place will it be fulfilled literally, in its fullest sense. Of course this will not happen in just one day. Everything has a development, and as these times approach, everything will become increasingly more difficult. It has always been like this: If you want to be successful in this world, you have to worship the beast. So if you want to become rich, you will drift away from God and pierce yourself with many sorrows. If you covet a high position, you have to think as the beast thinks, and you'll receive its mark on your forehead; and you must act like the beast acts, and as a result, you receive its mark on your hand. And the pressure will become increasingly intense as the beast with the seven heads and ten horns is revealed more and more; so even if you do not want to be rich, it will be difficult for you to be unaffected by it. This pressure will be extremely intense just before the bride is raptured; this is the first half of the night. But the beast can only literally carry this out after the rapture has taken place. Now the time for God's judgment of the harlot and, we can also say, of His disobedient children has arrived, and this proverb will be fulfilled: "If you can't learn from goodness, then evil will teach you." He chastens every son He loves. Heb. 12:6. These are the dark autumn nights and storms that the secondfruits must endure in order to mature. Take this to heart so you can be among those who give themselves for what is good and are taken in the rapture.

The Second Phase of God's Judgment

(Revelation 15 and 16)

"Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.'" Rev. 15:1-4.

Compare this song with the gospel the angel preached in Chapter 14:6-7. Here we see the secondfruits—the fruit of the gospel of the angel—standing and singing, for the time has come for God's judgment of the beast.

It was the harlot who persecuted the bride; so when the harlot falls, the bride will sing a new song. It was the beast that killed the secondfruits, so when judgment is executed on the beast, the secondfruits will stand and sing.

The seven last plagues are the wine of the wrath of God that is poured full strength from the cup of His anger. Up to this point, the cup of His anger was mixed with grace, and souls could be saved; but now it will be unmixed. No one will be saved during this time. All those who worshiped the beast will have to drink from the cup of God's wrath. They will have had their "good times" during which they created a heaven according to their own liking. God had given them the power to fulfill His Word by letting them wage war against the saints and overcome them. Now they are going to have to reap all the evil they have sown. With the seven last plagues the outpouring of God's wrath will be complete.

"Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were

completed." Verses 7-8.

When we read further about these angels pouring out their bowls, we see that there is no more grace. None! They only harden their hearts and mock God. The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness, and men gnawed their tongues because of the pain.

Armageddon

(Ezekiel 38 and 39)

When the angel pours out the sixth bowl, the kings will assemble for battle on that great Day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief." "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." This will be the last war before the millennium. Then Jesus will come again as a thief.

Armageddon, an ancient theater of war, is located in Palestine. During this judgment of God, the Jews have dwelt safely in Palestine. They have seen how God's punishment of the Gentiles has raged around them. Thousands have fallen on the one hand, and ten thousand on the other, but it has not come near them. Ps. 91. When they came to Palestine, they were able to bring their silver and their gold, because it belongs to the Lord. They lack nothing.

When the kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness and men gnaw their tongues in pain, a thought enters the mind of the false prophet—Gog, in the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. He begins to make an evil plan and says, "I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates—to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out [my] hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land." Ezek. 38:10-12.

During God's time of punishment, the Gentile nations will have become poor. They will be in need. Then they will turn their eyes to the Jews who are living in prosperity, and they will say: "Have they not stolen from us? Have they not traded with us, and cheated, and stolen from us? They have taken everything with them to their land; come, let us take it back!"

"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land." Joel 3:1-2.

"Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am strong."'" Verses 9-10.

What good is the beast's model government if God does not let it rain, when water turns to blood and the sun burns like fire? Nothing will grow on the earth; the vines will die. This is the heaven that the ungodly and the proud have created for themselves. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase." 1 Cor. 3:6-7. Here we can see that Paul gives all the glory to God. We must never allow ourselves to be contaminated by those who do not expect help from on high.

The salvation they have obtained and the heaven they have created by rejecting God and setting themselves up in His place is an earth that is scorched by the sun and where nothing grows. The beast is the color of scarlet, and the water has now turned into blood, but they will not humble themselves. They continue to blaspheme God, and a terrible war spirit rises up in them. These are the frog-spirits at work. Rev. 16:13-14. They have no need for hoes and pruning hooks now, and they cry out for them to be made into swords and spears. "Prepare for a holy war!" The false prophet manages to convince them that this is a holy war. "Why should the Jews sit in their glory and we sit here in our poverty and starve?"

"Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again." Joel 3:11-17.

Jehoshaphat means "God judges." Then the seventh bowl will be poured out. He has gathered all His enemies in the valley of Jehoshaphat to be a footstool

under His feet. Jesus is sitting at God's right hand and is waiting for that day. Heb. 10:12-13; Ps. 110:1.

The Gentiles do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand His counsel—that He has gathered them like sheaves for the threshing floor. Micah 4:12. Like sheaves! How significant. All the nations, all organizations have rejected God. People have been bound together as sheaves—they have taken the mark of the beast, and now they are being gathered onto the threshing floor.

In this need the daughter of Zion will travail like a woman in labor. The Jews will be terrified. They have neither gates nor barriers and are unable to withstand this army. It has still not dawned on them that it is God who has gathered them in Palestine and has been gracious to them during His judgment over the Gentiles. They attribute it to their own strength, their politics, and their own capabilities. But now at last they have been humbled so that they are able to acknowledge their helplessness. In their need they turn to God in earnest, and the promised Messiah can return as King.

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." Zech. 12:10.

Then Jesus will come as King, and it must be terrible then for the Jews to realize that it was He whom they crucified. However, the Jews have always been stiff-necked. Acts 7:51. The first time Moses wanted to help them, they rejected him, and he had to flee. The second time, they received him. The first time Moses came with the tablets of stone, he had to break them in pieces; but when he came the second time, they received them and kept them. The first time they were supposed to enter the land, they would not, and they had to wander in the desert for forty years. The second time, they entered in. It will be the same with Jesus. When Joseph rebuked and exhorted his brothers, they rejected him and sold him. They did the same to Jesus. But when they came into need, it was Joseph who had to save them. However, by then Joseph had taken a bride in Egypt. This is also how they will receive Jesus in their need. He will come as King together with His bride, who, for the most part, is taken from among the Gentiles. There will be, as it were, an invasion of "paratroopers" that will liberate the world from sin and unrighteousness.

Then Jesus will set His feet on the Mount of Olives from which He once ascended. He will come, together with all the saints. Zech. 14. This is when the

seventh and last bowl is poured out. The second sickle will be thrust into the earth to harvest the grapes from the vines of the earth, and the fruit will be cast into the great winepress of God's wrath. "And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs." Rev. 14:20. It doesn't pay to be a branch on this vine.

All the good that the true vine produces is the result of sacrifice. By these good works, the blood of our self-life is sacrificed. Those who are branches on the true vine die as a grain of wheat in order to bear fruit. It is the opposite with the branches on the false vine. All the good they do is motivated by self-interest. They seek honor in all their charitable organizations and think only of their personal advantage as they implement their social and welfare schemes. But now their time has come. Their blood will be pressed out in the winepress of God's wrath, and the blood will come up to the horses' bridles.

None of those who went down to Armageddon, to the valley of Jehoshaphat, will come back alive. Now evil will be pulled up by the root. "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh." Rev. 19:20-21.

The beast and the Antichrist are thrown alive into the lake of fire, while Christ and His bride ascend into heaven.

Judgment Over God's House

"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'" 1 Pet. 4:17.

We who are of the bride are God's house. Heb. 3:6. Judgment begins first with us. "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world." Jesus is the light of the world, and He said, "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness." No one can receive Jesus without being judged. They knew that in Jesus' time; they thought He had come to judge them. But He said, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17-21.

It is our own choice whether or not we receive Jesus—whether or not we allow ourselves to be judged. Those who love the truth come to the light now and are saved. Their sins are cleansed away as they acknowledge them.

"For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." 1 Cor. 11:31-32. These verses tell us that no one can escape God's judgment; however, we can postpone it. Now is the time of grace, and judgment is for our salvation. God's light shines into our hearts and shows us our sin little by little. If we acknowledge it, the blood of Jesus cleanses us, and we can forsake it in the power of the Spirit. This is how we can be saved from wrath, because Jesus came full of grace and truth. Many people want to have grace in the form of forgiveness, but they do not love the truth which can free them from sin. They want to have their sin covered, but they do not want to give it up. During this time of grace, it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance, and this succeeds with the bride—God's house—because they judge themselves. However, as we have seen previously, it takes God's wrath to bring the others to repentance.

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the

righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds." Rom. 2:4-6.

Treasuring up. Think of a pile of stones. You sense the Spirit's chastisement because of your vanity and you seek the honor of man, but you have a hard heart and so you disregard the judgment; you make one excuse after another. The Spirit's voice grows quieter, and you have a kind of peace. However, you should know that you have treasured up that judgment until the day of God's wrath. You are envious and love to preach, you show partiality, are greedy and covetous, etc. You sense the Spirit's judgment in your inner man. Grace—God's goodness—is over you unto salvation, but you disregard it. You will not be among the firstfruits; you do not love the truth. God does not torment you. He will leave you in peace. He even shows you care and goodness, and you believe that He is with you. Is. 57:11. "I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not hear.'" Jer. 22:21. You believe that you have avoided judgment. Not at all! You have only postponed it—you have treasured it up until the day of God's wrath.

I would say with Jesus: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace." Now is not the time for you to be taken by force. It is God's house that is being judged now—those who love the truth and come to the light. They willingly choose to go into the fire with all the self-life that the light has revealed to them, and so they are saved. They receive divine nature in place of their corrupt, human nature. They become God's house. This is how God, through His goodness, separates the firstfruits. They will not be judged together with the world.

We can see that it is difficult even for the righteous to be saved. We gather together for meetings, and we speak God's Word in all its sharpness; and the sharper it is, the better we like it. We pray to God and exhort one another. Nevertheless, partaking of divine nature—being saved from "I, me, and mine"—is a slow process. How do you think it will go with the ungodly and the sinner—those who cannot bear being corrected without getting offended? Prayer meetings are the worst thing they can imagine. We have already seen what their end will be. Take this to heart, be sober, and sin no more.

When we read of God's punishment over the ungodly, we read of thunder and fire. This thunder is the accumulation of the loving whispers of God's judgment in the heart—those judgments that, hour by hour, were salvation to the bride. The fire is the accumulation of that fire which, little by little, has consumed the corrupt human nature of the bride. But now, all this will come

upon the ungodly and the sinner in one day. Oh, how important the apostle's exhortation is: "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God." Heb. 12:15.

The time for judgment over God's house is from the day of Pentecost until the rapture.

The Marriage of the Lamb

(Revelation 19)

"After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.' Again they said, 'Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.'" Verses 1-4.

The first time we read the word "Alleluia" in the New Testament is when the harlot receives her judgment. This "Alleluia" comes from a great multitude in heaven. Such a cry of joy could only come from heaven. It comes from the bride of Christ who has battled against the harlot's destructive sorcery, which has finally come to an end. Those who are on the earth at this time will be under God's judgment, so they will be thinking about something quite different than shouting "Alleluia." But in heaven this rings out:

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Verses 7 and 8.

The marriage of the Lamb will take place in heaven while God's judgment is being poured out over the beast and all who worship it. This is when the wedding feast takes place. The five wise virgins will go into the marriage feast, because they are ready. On earth it will be midnight. It was granted to the wise virgins to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure; these were their righteous deeds.

We see that the bride has woven her own wedding dress; it is her works. And yet it says, "To her it was granted" "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Phil. 1:11. "To her it was granted to be arrayed" The good works were prepared beforehand, but the bride had to walk in them, to clothe herself in them. She was created in

Christ Jesus to do them. "For we are his workmanship" We have already explained this salvation. Now the bride has made herself ready. She followed the Lamb wherever He went. Her wedding dress is ready.

There are many who confuse the wedding dress with the wedding garments. Jesus talks about the latter in His parable about the man who came to a wedding without a garment. Matt. 22:12. Obviously the bride will be clothed differently than the guests. The wedding garments are imputed righteousness without works—justification by faith in Jesus' blood, reconciliation to God by the death of His Son. Rom. 4:5 and 5:9-10. The wedding dress denotes personal righteousness—faith *working* through love. Gal. 5:6.

"Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" Rev. 19:9.

There will be guests at the wedding, and you can be certain that no one will be allowed in who will have to be cast out later. First and foremost, the bridegroom's friends will be there. John 3:29. John the Baptist was a friend of the bridegroom; Abraham is called a friend of God. We will see Enoch, Noah, Elijah, and all the saints who lived in the Old Testament, who received a good testimony through faith. Heb. 11. When Jesus rose from the dead, He took many saints with Him up from their graves. Matt. 27:52-53. It will be a glorious assembly!

Following the wedding feast, John sees the heavens open up. Then comes the "invasion" we have already mentioned. Jesus comes with His bride to establish His kingdom. Then Song of Solomon 6:4 will be fulfilled: "O my love, you are beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners!"

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Rev. 19:11-16.

This is the Lamb, the Bridegroom, going forth with His bride—the called, chosen, and faithful—to war against the beast and the false prophet. Rev. 17:14.

What a honeymoon that will be! How blessed it will be to have a part in liberating the earth from Satan's tyranny, which has lasted for thousands of years. The wedding feast will continue on the earth after Satan has been bound.

"O Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.' For on this mountain the hand of the Lord will rest, and Moab shall be trampled down under Him, as straw is trampled down for the refuse heap. And He will spread out His hands in their midst as a swimmer reaches out to swim, and He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands." Is. 25:11.

In that day, the Messiah will come as King together with the saints and will free the Jews from Gog and all his forces—the godless proud. He will take away the reproach of His people from the earth. Then they will say, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us." The Jews have been waiting for Him since the days of David. When He comes they will say, "This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Then the veil that is spread over all nations will be taken away. This veil was removed from our eyes when we were converted. 2 Cor. 3:15-16. Only when the Lord comes again will it be removed from all the nations, and He will wipe away all the tears from their eyes. As for Moab, He will tread him down like straw in a dungpit. Moab is God's enemy. The gospel Jesus brought is living water, clear as crystal. Rev. 22:1; John 4:10. We have already heard the gospel of these beasts with their political programs. They are like dung, and in this dung they will be trodden down. In the midst of this, those who follow the beast will spread out their hands to swim. There have always been such people. They have gone their own way with proud, stiff necks, but when things go wrong

and they are exposed for what they are, they are unwilling to acknowledge their folly. They always try to swim. To save themselves, they begin to explain that they didn't really mean it that way, that everyone has misunderstood them, etc. But Moab cannot save himself. "And He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands." Is. 25:11.

Then He will prepare a table on the mountain for everyone who is left and for all those who did not go down to the battle of Armageddon.

"For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,' says the Lord, 'as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord.'" Is. 66:18-20.

He will serve them a feast of fat things, full of marrow: "Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." He will prepare a table before them, and they will be satisfied with righteousness.

Pure vintage wine—they will see the promises fulfilled—what once looked so confused and impossible, what so few would believe, will now be pure, clarified, vintage wine. They will drink, rejoice and be glad because of the fulfilled promises. What a richly spread table! The word of the angel applies here also: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

The parable of the marriage of the king's son fits in here. Matt. 22:1-14. For many years now God has been sending out His servants with invitations to the marriage. But those who have been invited have continually made excuses; they have always had something that hindered them. Not content with excusing themselves, they have gone on to persecute His servants. But now the day of grace is over, and the time of His judgment has arrived. "[The king] was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." Verse 7. We have already seen how this will happen, and the countries where Christ has been preached will have to bear the brunt of His judgment. Those who heard the message hardened their hearts and received the Antichrist instead. They will face a very dark time.

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'" Matt. 22:8-9. This is the fulfillment of what we read in Isaiah 66:18-20. "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests." Matt. 22:10.

Perhaps Paul's words will again be fulfilled. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

While the cultivated, enlightened, and so-called Christian nations (who in their sophisticated development worshiped the Antichrist) lie there wallowing in their dung, God will send His missionaries to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, to those who have not heard God's invitation. He will gather the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, the good and the evil. Perhaps then the nations of Africa, Asia, and India, etc., will have their time, those who have been looked down upon and whom the beast and the false prophet perhaps did not care so much about. Then the Word will be fulfilled which says, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." 1 John 2:2. We can now better understand the Word that says: "God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." 1 Tim. 4:10. The bride is the one who believed, but He has become the Savior for these people too. Rom. 2:13-16.

When all the guests were gathered, the king came to see them. He wanted to see if everything was in order. We read that the king saw one guest who wasn't wearing a wedding garment, one who still had not acknowledged his fallen condition and had not received the redemption of Christ. He thought he was good enough as he was, so he had not put on a wedding garment. The king saw him and said, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" He still called him "friend" and was gentle toward him. Perhaps he was unaware of his need for a wedding garment. If he had confessed his need and asked for grace, he might still have been saved. But he said nothing. "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" Matt. 22:13.

So now the temple has been cleansed; the earth has become a house of prayer. There will be feasting and peace for a thousand years. "'In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.'" Zech. 3:10.

The Millennium

(Revelation 20)

"I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time." Dan. 7:11-12.

"Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." Verses 17-18.

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Dan. 2:44.

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them." Rev. 20:1-4.

This is the beginning of the millennium. The first thing that will happen is that the beast and the false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire, and Satan will be bound. John saw thrones with people seated on them. Who are they? They are the King of Kings and those who followed Him upon white horses. They are the Bridegroom and His bride. Rev. 17:14. They have been given authority to execute judgment.

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" 1 Cor. 6:2-3. "And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man." John 5:27.

This will be a court of inquiry. It will be a terrible day for those who have

sided with the enemy. Who could be more qualified to execute such a judgment than those who have voluntarily judged themselves? They have loved God's judgments over their life and have loved Him who willingly bore the chastisement for our sins so we could have peace. Is. 53:5.

"Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Rev. 20:4.

This is the literal fulfillment of Jesus' word in Matthew 16:25: "But whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Their lives were cut short by perhaps 20 or 30 years, but they received a thousand years in return—a thousand years as kings and priests! "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." Rev. 20:5.

The first resurrection is a resurrection of the secondfruits, of whom it is written, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from now on." This is not the time when Jesus fetches His bride; that is the rapture. Those who are the bride of Christ will be sitting on thrones executing judgment when the first resurrection takes place.

"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Verse 5. These people did not lose their lives for Jesus' sake. On the contrary, they preserved their lives in this world, and therefore lost the great blessing of living in the millennium.

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Verse 6.

Indeed, blessed and holy are all those who have a part in the first resurrection! The fact that they are there means that they have already received their judgment. Those who sit upon the thrones have judged them worthy. They will even be kings and priests. They have sacrificed their lives and have overcome the beast. God rewards abundantly. A short time of pain and affliction, then a thousand years of glory, and after that, eternal life! We do well to remember Jesus' words, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32.

You "little flock," who have Jesus as your Shepherd and Overseer—you are as sheep among wolves. You are shoved aside everywhere you go. You are threatened and intimidated. Fear not. Follow your Shepherd in faith. He is

watching over you, and He knows the way. "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life." Rev. 2:8. He knows the way. He will surely give you the kingdom. Your time will also come.

"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." Dan. 7:18. The millennium will be the fulfillment of this. The church of the living God is the stone that was cut out of the mountain without the hands of man. Dan. 2:34. It is taken out of the mountain of humanity by the work of the Spirit. Who would have thought that this little stone—these few insignificant people—would one day have such great significance? This is that "living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious." 1 Pet. 2:4. This stone was not in the hands of men but in the hands of God, which is why it had such tremendous power.

Hear, you who are held captive in this mountain of humanity; you are the slave of men; you are at their mercy, afraid that they will reject you. "Fear not, little flock." When people cast you out, you will be cast into the hands of God. That is when you receive power. One day God will send you back to them, and you will crush to powder all the kingdoms that man has raised up; and you, "*little flock*," will fill the whole earth. This will be fulfilled in the millennium.

The entire creation longs for this fulfillment. "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now;" "In hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Rom. 8:21-22. The creation is not waiting for the regime of the beast; it only groans under it, because then there will be earthquakes, thunder, and lightning, but no rain. Water will be turned to blood. The whole creation groans in travail, but when the saints take the kingdom, the curse will be removed, and the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. Listen to how it will be:

"No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed

together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,' says the Lord." Is. 65: 20-25.

No employer will exploit his fellow man. Neither will one build and another live there, nor one plant and another eat. Everyone will enjoy the fruit of his own labor, and there will no longer be conflict in nature.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Is. 11.69.

Truly this is a kingdom of peace! Many children will be born, and they will all grow up. Men will grow as old as trees. The people who live on earth at the beginning of the millennium, those who are not slain at Armageddon but who are invited to the feast on the mountain, will have the same flesh as before; this is also the case with those who are born later. But Satan and all the spiritual hosts of wickedness will be bound, so there will be no one to mislead the people. If there is still someone far out on the periphery who sins, he will be accursed and not live for more than a hundred years.

The world will be ruled from Jerusalem, the hub of the earth. It will become the capital of the world. Then Jesus will sit upon the throne of David: "And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3:20-21.

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make

them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." Micah 4:14.

Today there are mountain tops and hills where men go to conduct negotiations. They travel to London, Berlin, San Francisco, Moscow, etc., but in that day Jerusalem will be exalted above all the hills. All nations will send their important officials there. Zech. 14:16-19. The law of the Lord will proceed from Jerusalem. All the peace conferences that are held in today's "high places" result in "Prepare for war, beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears." The rulers of this present world are not able to determine equitable borders; their decisions only give rise to fresh hatred. But when the seat of judgment is moved to Jerusalem, then equitable boundaries will be established. The borders that Christ and the saints will set will be acknowledged by all men as righteous to the farthest corners of the earth. This will result in the cry, "Beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks." Then the earth will be blessed and will yield its fruit. There will be no more fighting for shorter working hours, and every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and every man will be his neighbor's guest.

This is what all mankind really longs for, but they do not have the faith to wait for Jesus. They let themselves be fooled by the beasts, these heads with horns that keep rising up. These beasts seem so powerful that many people worship them out of fear. But "Fear not, little flock." Wait for "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Tit. 2:13. Let grace teach you in this time of waiting to "[deny] ungodliness and worldly lusts, [and to] live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." Tit. 2:11-14. If you do not let grace teach and chasten you now, one day you will be chastened by God's wrath. Do not be afraid if you have to go without things or you lose your job. We are not to own anything together with the beasts. All things belong to us, but we must wait for Jesus' timing. It is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Some might ask, "How should we behave with regard to the present governing authorities until the time when we are raptured?" Our attitude should be just what Paul writes in Romans 13:1-7: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."

But how could God possibly have instituted all these governing authorities we have been reading about? The fact is that if people are ungodly, God punishes them with a bad government. He does what is written in Isaiah 3:4: "I

will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them." Should we obey? Yes, we must also submit to bad forms of government with one exception: Peter and the apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. We are not to commit sin. Our conscience will warn us. "But shouldn't we try to get into politics so we can have a positive influence?" you wonder. No, we should do what James writes, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . . You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." James 5:7-8. Should we just remain passive then? No, not at all. Paul says, "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." 1 Tim. 2:1-3.

The only way we can help society and the government is by prayer and a God-fearing life. Had there been just ten righteous souls in Sodom and Gomorrah, these cities would have been spared. We are a counterbalance for ungodliness. "I will make peace your authority and righteousness your government." Is. 60:17 (Norw.). God turns the hearts of kings like streams of water. By our intercession God can turn the thoughts of those in power to pass laws that allow us to live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Satan Let Loose

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." Rev. 20:7-8.

How strange that such a thing should happen. You might ask, "Why should Satan be loosed again?" It is to test all those who are born during the millennium. They, too, must learn to discern between good and evil and have an opportunity to choose. But when everything has been so wonderful in the millennium, how can they be deceived? Yet even in the Garden of Eden they allowed themselves to be deceived! There Adam and Eve received just one commandment, and Satan came to free them from that one as well. He seemed to have such care for them. He offered to make their lives so much better than God had, and they believed him. They thought they would be happy by breaking God's law. Oh, how many people live in this same deception. Young people think that being free from the commandments will make them happy. What a deception! No, not at all! Only God's law and God's will can lead us into happiness. Therefore, resist Satan, firm in the faith that God truly cares for you. Then Satan will flee. 1 Pet. 5:7-9.

Satan will not begin this deception in or around Jerusalem. He knows that will not work. He will begin at the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—as far from the center as possible. It is just the same today. Many live on the periphery of the church where they are easy prey for the cunning devices of Satan. (Gog and Magog have become familiar names to us from the accounts we read about the Antichrist and the battle of Armageddon.)

"They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." Rev. 20:9.

Satan succeeds in deceiving people again, but he is not satisfied with that. His goal is to crush the camp of the saints. Since he did not succeed in leading them astray before, he will not even attempt that this time. He cannot forget the time he had to depart from Jesus, the time he lost his hold on Peter, or when Paul exposed his devices. 2 Cor. 2:10-11. Neither can he forget those who would

rather pluck out an eye or cut off a hand than sin. But this time he thinks that with a great host of deceived people, he will be able to conquer the holy city. This has always been his plan. If he cannot deceive people, he persecutes them, spreads false rumors about them, brands them as deceivers, and even tries to slay them. He is bent on destroying those who stand before God's face, on ruining their reputation, and on sowing seeds of suspicion about them. But by this time, that will no longer be possible. The camp of the saints has already passed through death. These are victorious, resurrected people with glorified bodies. The kingdom they establish will be an eternal kingdom, and it will never be taken from them.

Now we can understand why the rest of the dead cannot come to life yet. They have not overcome. If they were raised up when Satan was released, they would have been deceived again. It is actually a blessing that they are not resurrected at that time.

Usually when Satan is unable to achieve his ends by deception, he kills and torments people, but this time he makes a fatal blunder. He advances so far that he besieges the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but now his day of reckoning has come. "And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Rev. 20:9-10.

In the first battle at Armageddon, before the millennium, it will be Satan's son, the Antichrist, who will take the lead; but in this battle, following the millennium, Satan himself will lead. This will be his last chance, and it will lead him into the lake of fire forever and ever.

Tried

"That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:7.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials [when you undergo all manner of temptations (Norw.)], knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." James 1:2-3.

Temptations are a test of our faith. To be tried is truly grace from God. Trials have two purposes. We can learn this from the story of Job. After going to and fro on the earth, Satan came and presented himself before the Lord. His aim has always been to get people to forsake God, and, alas, he has been all too successful. God had one man, however, who was trustworthy. He asked Satan if he had considered His servant Job. Satan had, but he did not regard Job as anyone special. And he said that under the circumstances, it was hardly surprising that Job had not forsaken God; after all, He had put a hedge around him and had protected him in all his ways. But God trusted Job; you could say that He made a wager with Satan that Satan would be unable to make Job forsake God. Satan did his best and was even able to win over Job's wife; but Job himself remained unshakable.

If Job had only known what was really happening, he would no doubt have borne all his afflictions joyfully, but he was totally in the dark. That is precisely why his trial was so heavy. But Job was faithful in his heart. Although he didn't understand what was going on and felt that his trials were unjust, he refused to forsake God, and so God won the wager. He convinced Satan that He had one man on earth that Satan could not control, even though he had been allowed to do whatever he wanted with Job.

We see how little it takes for most people to forsake God in their hearts. Satan has only to offer them a boyfriend or girlfriend, more money or human honor. Often he only has to touch their possessions or cause them to be unjustly treated, or allow something to happen that they cannot understand. Great is the multitude that has forsaken God in their hearts. Their faith has failed, and Satan has rejoiced.

You who have failed and fallen away, if you had only understood what was at

stake, what the conflict was all about, then you would have rejoiced in your trials.

But God also has many who have been faithful. Satan has done all he could but has achieved nothing. He was even allowed to take their lives, but still they did not fail God. They praised Him in the face of execution, they praised Him in poverty, in sickness, and in adversity when they understood nothing of what was happening. Their tried faith will be to the praise, honor, and glory of God at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Job's trial had another purpose: to cleanse and refine him and to open his eyes to God's omnipotence and loving care. Listen to what Job said at the end of his trials, "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. . . . Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . . I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:2-6.

As every sincere soul will discover, trials open our eyes to many things that need to be cleansed from our lives; but if a person hardens his heart, he adds sin to sin. The godly emerge from their trials as gold from the melting pot. 1 Pet. 4:12-13. Their eyes are opened to God's love and care.

"Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning." Job 42:12.

The Final Judgment

(Revelation 20)

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." Rev. 20:11-20.

God keeps very accurate accounts. Jesus said we must even answer for every idle word. Each of us writes a book with our life. Everything we do is recorded in our memory. In reality, we don't forget anything. There are many things we have seemingly forgotten; but someone can remind us of a situation. If we still do not remember, he describes some details, and suddenly the whole episode comes back to us. Imagine what it will be like when God begins to page through our memories.

If we have committed sin, it is good to make it right as soon as possible. Then it can be cleansed away and cast into the sea of forgetfulness, so that later we will only have to give account for good works. The names of all those who receive eternal life are written in the Book of Life, even those who have been plucked as a brand from the fire. 1 Cor. 3:15. On that day, that final day, all people and all nations will be resurrected. "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works." Rev. 20:13.

"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left." Matt. 25:31-46.

All the heathen people will be there too. Millions of them have been ignorant of the law and of the gospel, yet some of them have done by nature what the law required. The words of the law are written in their hearts, their consciences bearing witness and their thoughts either accusing or excusing them "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my [Paul's] gospel." Rom. 2:12-16. These are sheep who would have let themselves

be led, if they had only been given a chance to hear.

Then Jesus will say, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." They will answer, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?" Matt. 25:35-37. They have been unaware that it was Jesus they had blessed. They had no idea that the good they did was for Jesus' sake, but they had a sincere care for their fellow men. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Verse 34. This was their reward for being faithful to the law that was written in their hearts.

"But glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." Rom. 2:10-11.

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Matt. 25:41. They had not understood to do anything for Jesus' sake; they didn't have a heart for that. Their hearts were hard and closed to their fellow men. "Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek." Rom. 2:9. "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matt. 25:46.

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Rev. 20:14-15. No wonder Jesus said that we should rejoice because our names are written in the Book of Life.

All the nations will be judged at this time. The bride and all those who were resurrected and who reigned with Christ in the millennium will not go through this judgment. Their accounts will have been settled long ago. We could call the sheep on His right hand "the thirdfruits."

The accounts are now settled, and everything has been put in its rightful place—a complete reformation. Sin and death are finally gone forever. Out of all the affliction and misery and in spite of Satan's deceptive power, God, by His wisdom and might, has created a bride for the Lamb (the firstfruits) out of a sinful, fallen people. He has created kings for the new earth (the secondfruits) and nations to inhabit the new earth (the thirdfruits).

We can use an example from everyday life. When a cabinetmaker has made a

fine, polished piece of furniture, we don't just see the finished product; there is also a pile of sawdust, shavings, and scraps. The furniture could not have been made without leaving behind such a pile, which is then swept up and burned. Likewise with this tremendous work of God, there is a great "waste" of human life. God could not do anything with these people. They will be gathered up and cast into the lake of fire.

This is unspeakably serious, a seriousness that Jesus constantly reminded His listeners of. Several of His parables end like this: "Enter into My glory"; "Cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." After sharing many such parables with them, Jesus said to His disciples, "'Have you understood all these things?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'" Matt. 13:50-51.

It is also my longing that anyone reading this book will also be able to understand it. There is still time for you to be taught and disciplined by grace. If this fails, the wrath of God will chasten you. If you then harden your heart, you will simply become waste material, ready for the lake of fire.

People stand and admire a fine, polished piece of furniture and extol its maker without even noticing the pile of waste or giving a thought to what was consumed by the fire. In the same way, God and the Lamb will be praised for all eternity, and the ungodly will be remembered no more.

Eternity

(Revelation 21 and 22)

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea." Rev. 21:1.

In eternity there will also be a heaven and an earth. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth with all its full-ness, He saw that it was very good. Everything was just the way He wanted it. But then sin came and ruined it all, resulting in the curse with its thorns, thistles, and famines. The curse will be abolished in the millennial kingdom that will be on this present earth. God will demonstrate His power by establishing a kingdom of peace on an earth that has been a valley of tears for thousands of years. Everyone will be convinced that it is sin that ruins everything.

But couldn't God let the present heavens and earth remain in eternity? We know that Jesus has cleansed the heavenly things by His blood, but the fact that sin has been present there is enough for God's zeal to allow fire to consume it all. Heb. 9:11-23. He hates even the garments defiled by the flesh. Jude 23; 2 Pet. 3:7-10. Satan had access to God, and he stood there accusing the saints day and night. Then Michael and his angels cast Satan down to earth, and Jesus went in with His blood and sat down at God's right hand as our Advocate to make intercession for us. Rev. 12:7-12. When all of God's counsel has been fulfilled and Satan has been cast into the lake of fire, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. The difference that is mentioned between the present earth and the new earth is that on the new earth there will be no more sea.

"Then I . . . saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.'" Rev. 21:2-3.

There is a common misunderstanding that all of us will be alike and equal in eternity, but that is not what God's Word says. "There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon,

and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." 1 Cor. 15:40-42.

Here the apostle makes it very clear that there will be vast differences. The new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven is made up of those people who have been built up as a dwelling place for God in the Spirit. 1 Pet. 2:5. They will have heavenly bodies. They will come down to the new earth. The people that live there will all have earthly bodies. Here we can see the difference in glory: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them . . ." Rev. 21:3. That will be incredibly glorious! See how great it is to be built up as a dwelling place for God: "'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.'" Verses 4-5.

Although there are varying degrees of glory, we see that everyone will receive some glory. But we are reminded of these words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Those who receive comfort are happy, but the ones who give comfort are even happier. How wonderful it will be when every tear is wiped away. What rejoicing that will bring. Think what it will be like to be one who wipes tears away. That is the work of the firstfruits, those whose sole desire during their earthly pilgrimage has been to do good, but who have had their longing only partially fulfilled. They have been limited by time, by their mortal bodies, and by their means and abilities; but then God will fulfill all their desire according to His riches in glory throughout all eternity.

"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Verse 8. For these people there is no more hope. Nothing can save them from the second death.

Then John saw the Lamb's wife, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, "having the glory of God." They had partaken of divine nature. Their radiance was like a most precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal. They had walked in the light and become children of the light. "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

It is the same today. People need the sun and moon to give them light; in

other words, they receive light from *without*. They do not walk by faith but by sight. Their understanding is molded by neighbors, television, advertising, fashion magazines, etc. But as for the firstfruits—the bride—their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who teaches them all things. They live in faith and receive light from within. This is how it will be in eternity, "For the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

This is the city Abraham was waiting for, the city with firm foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. Abraham dwelt as a stranger in the land of promise. He sat in his tent together with Isaac and Jacob and spoke about this city. Heb. 11:9-10. If they could see so far into the future, how much more should we see, we who are called to be the city itself?

"And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." Verse 24. We see the same thing today. Those who are earthly do not know how to cope with life's difficulties. When they need help, they go to those who are spiritual and walk in their light, just like the moon reflects the light of the sun. The nations on the new earth, the thirdfruits, have never walked in the light and become children of light. They have only experienced reconciliation with God by the death of Jesus, and now they must walk by the light of the city. The light of the Lamb does not shine on them directly; it shines on them through the city. This dependent relationship will last for all eternity.

"And the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." Verses 24 and 26. The kings of the earth have the great privilege of bringing the glory and honor of their nations into the city. Today, if a nation wants to give a king a gift as a token of its thankfulness, it gives him the most precious thing it has. It is not the gift itself that the king values, but the thankfulness that it represents. Usually a man who is close to the king is chosen to present the gift. He joins in the festivities and enjoys greater blessings than the rest of the people. But the greatest joy and glory is reserved for the king.

The nations on the new earth will have a deep sense of gratitude and honor because of the blessings that will flow to them from the throne of God and the Lamb through the city. The kings will bear this glory into the city. God, the Lamb, and the city will highly value this glory. It will be as Paul said in Phil. 4:17, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." "Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we

rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" 1 Thess. 3:7-10. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." 1 Thess. 2:19-20.

Paul is, of course, a part of the city, and these verses had already become his personal testimony when he lived here on earth.

"And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Rev. 22:1-2.

From this we can see that the nations will be totally dependent on the city. In order to live, they will have to eat of the tree of life, as they did in Paradise. They do not have eternal life abiding in themselves, so they are dependent on the city to live. "And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:15. But we do know that a murderer can receive eternal life as a gift. The thief on the cross was allowed to go into Paradise with Jesus. There he can live forever by eating of the tree of life.

"But he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:17. Doing the will of God is the greatest thing we can do here in this sinful world. Those who do God's will partake of His divine nature, and they have eternal life abiding in them. They are the city, and they have heavenly bodies.

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever." Rev. 22:3-5.

We see that everything centers around God, the Lamb, and the city. We can't help but exclaim, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." Verse 14.

You could perhaps ask: If Satan was once an anointed cherub (see Ezek. 28:14) and yet could fall into sin, couldn't the same situation arise and start the misery all over again? No, that won't happen. In the beginning everything was untried, but everything that remains for eternity will have already been tried

and tested. The fire will have consumed whatever could burn. Everyone in eternity will have experienced good and evil, so they will not be ignorant of it, as Adam and Eve were. A multitude of angels fell with Satan (Jude 6), so even the angels have been given the choice. They have also been tried. God will make sure that there will be two testimonies to these things throughout all eternity. One will be the smoke of the torment of those who worshiped the beast. This will ascend for all eternity. Rev. 14:11. The other will be the smoke of the harlot, which will also arise forever and ever. Rev. 19:3. It was the harlot and the beast that destroyed the first earth. These two columns of smoke will stand for all eternity as a testimony of what the new heaven and the new earth have been spared from.

"Then He said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place." Rev. 22:6.

"And none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." Dan. 12:10. God wants to reveal to His servants the things which are to come. You can't study your way to this understanding. You must cleanse yourself by obeying the truth and serve the living God; then you will understand. The fear of the Lord is understanding. For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus patiently endured the cross. We, too, can look into the joy that awaits us. "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." Eph. 1:9-10.

When we see the glory of Christ, all this world's glory becomes as dung. Then we are able to see how all-encompassing God's plan is, and all our questions are answered. When we look into the mystery of God's plan, we realize that we have tremendous things to live for. Our present sufferings are as nothing by comparison when we can see what God is going to do in the last time. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials." 1 Pet. 1:6. Truly our afflictions are momentary and light!

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Jesus' Footstool

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool." Heb. 10:12-13. "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." 1 Cor. 15:25.

This footstool is the Antichrist, that man of sin who exalts himself. Jesus humbled himself. Phil. 2:5-8. Every spirit of pride and everyone who admires what is highly esteemed in the world is Jesus' enemy. These people will all be gathered into one in the Antichrist. We read about the beast in Revelation 13:6-8; "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

When the time comes that all worship the beast, then all pride—all the enemies of Jesus—will be gathered into one person, the lawless one. Jesus' footstool will then be complete, and the time will have come for the lawless one to take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. But the time will also have come for Jesus to place His foot on the footstool. He will consume the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth and destroy him with the brightness of His coming. 2 Thess. 2.

The development of Jesus' footstool is clearly evident today. Everything is being gathered into one; everything has to be "great." To avoid being drawn into this development along with everyone else, you must strive to remain in lowliness, as Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:16. This is the only way you can avoid being gathered together with Jesus' enemies as His footstool.

You can see this development very clearly in the business world. Small businesses can no longer survive; everything is being merged into big corporations. Individual countries no longer have sole control over the import and export of their own goods. Countries must make trade agreements with each other. They must unite as a bloc to have any influence.

It's the same situation in politics. Individual countries can no longer make

independent political decisions. No matter what political ideology they profess, they are obliged to make allies with other countries in these blocs. Since World War II, the world has basically been divided into two blocs: East and West. All countries must align themselves with either the East or the West. After the war, politicians began to talk about one united world. This is what these two blocs are working toward. This will come to pass under the Antichrist, Jesus' footstool.

"And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way." 2 Thess. 2:6-7.

Jesus came to fulfill the law. The law is fulfilled in all those who walk according to the Spirit. Rom. 8:4. Therefore, all lawlessness is Christ's enemy and will be gathered into one in "the lawless one." "And now you know what is restraining" The most important restraint is the conscience. But there are powerful forces at work today to do away with it. Every possible means is used to portray the conscience as an assortment of old-fashioned complexes produced by Christianity. These forces try in particular to undermine the moral principles that have been handed down to us in God's commandments and that have been a safeguard for the individual, the family, and the nation. Teachers, radio, television, and producers of pornographic literature are working deliberately to break down the protective restraint of the conscience. This is the lawlessness that draws all other lawlessness along with it. It characterized the time of Noah and Lot, and it is also characteristic of our time. It is ripening the world for the coming of the Antichrist and for the wrath of God.

"He who now restrains" It is the church that builds up the body of Christ, He who said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matt. 5:28. Lawlessness has advanced to such an extent that women have lost their sense of modesty. They make it a point by the way they dress and act to get men to lust after them. The so-called Christians follow the same development, and they have also lost their sense of modesty. They are all being drawn into the footstool as enemies of Jesus. Paul warned strongly against the sin of immorality because of which the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience. "Therefore do not be partakers with them." See Ephesians 5:3-7 and Colossians 3:5-6.

It is obvious that almost all Christian movements are influenced by the spirit of Antichrist, by "him who exalts himself." Think of the Pope, who at his inauguration is carried on an elegant throne at the head of a long procession.

Church buildings have to be ornate, adorned with all the glitter and pomp of this world. Other religious denominations build their churches in the same style, as far as their means permit. And of course they have to have high platforms where the pastor and elders sit on display. No matter how small the flock is, they must have a figure to look up to. If any of these leaders publish an article, it has to include their photograph. All of these things are part of this spirit "who opposes and exalts himself." Their development consists of being gathered into the footstool, the Antichrist.

It is very significant that it says, "He who opposes." They are genuine opposers of the fulfillment of the law, the obedience of faith. They call it bondage. They are fervently opposed to humbling themselves and living in lowliness. They love what is highly esteemed in the eyes of men, which Jesus said is an abomination to God. Luke 16:15.

Religious groups are doing exactly the same as politicians and businessmen; they gather into one. They say they are being ecumenical, and they believe they are fulfilling Jesus' prayer that we might be one. They do not understand that they are being gathered into one in the footstool, the enemies of Jesus. It is also significant that it is called "the mystery of lawlessness." How amazing that the development of the Antichrist as Jesus' footstool is so hidden.

Praise God for the few who continue to restrain; they are being united in Christ and built up as His body. I want to especially exhort young people: Wake up! Put on the spirit of zeal and fight the good fight of faith! Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called. Purify yourselves from every vestige of pride, immodesty, and immorality, just as He is pure! 1 John 3:3; 1 Tim. 6:11-12. This is the only way to avoid being gathered with Jesus' enemies in the footstool that He will tread under His feet when He returns.

Footnotes

[1] In the beginning there was a great deal of conflict about whether the Gentiles who had become Christians should be placed under the law, and if so, to what extent. The meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem and the epistle to the Galatians testify to this. Paul went to great lengths to explain that they were free from the law and yet not free to live according to the flesh. He explains that the law is spiritual and good and not in conflict with the promises of God. Gal. 3:21. He also explains that we are not set free from the law in the sense that it is taken away; no, what sets us free is our dying to that which held us captive. When the first man dies, the one who made us bear fruit for death, we can be married to Christ, who died and is risen again for us. When He has become our head and leader, the law becomes

superfluous, and there is no danger of our slipping into the lusts and passions of the flesh. Gal. 5:23. Under no circumstances should we rejoice in being free from the law if we let the first man—the flesh—live.

[2] See "The Articles of Confession of the Norwegian Lutheran Church" by C.P. Caspar and Gisle Johnson, Article 9.

[3] "Luther's Pastoral Letter."

[4] John does not write "commit sin"; on the contrary, his purpose in writing to them was that they should not commit sin. "To have sin" is the same as having a self-will—passions and desires which must be denied.

[5] A Norwegian reformer in the 19th century.

[6] This was written before Israel was established as a nation-state in 1948. (Ed.)

[7] Bevin did exactly the opposite of what he had promised, but God proved that He was not dependent on him. Jerusalem is now in the hands of the Jews, but the mosque, the "temple" for the Arabs is situated where the temple used to be. This is God's longsuffering in our days, just as it waited in Noah's days. 1 Pet. 3:20. It seems that we have grace to build the church (1 Pet. 2:5) as long as the Jews cannot build their temple.