

Chapter XV

The Flesh and the Spirit in the Church Age

THE PARABLE OF A NET CAST INTO THE SEA

We come now to the seventh and final parable. It is the parable of a net cast into the sea. Our Lord said: *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 13:47-50).

At the beginning of this study of the seven parables in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, we stated, the sea represents the Gentile nations of the world. This is borne out in a vision of Daniel's in the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, where he revealed a vision in which four beasts arose from the sea. Prophetically this indicated that there would be four Gentile world empires that would arise from the Mediterranean world. They were to reign from the time of the

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prophecy until the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

Daniel had been carried into captivity in Babylon by the emperor of the first kingdom, and near the end of his life, Daniel saw the Jews returned from captivity by the emperor of the second kingdom. Daniel related his vision as follows: *And four great beast came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns* (Daniel 7:3-7).

The four beasts of Daniel's vision are four world kingdoms. The first three have passed into history, and the fourth kingdom is still in existence. The three kingdoms which have passed into history are Babylon, Persia and Greece. The fourth kingdom is the Roman empire. It declined politically about 480 A.D. However it still has existence in the Roman church, and it will have political power once again under the rule of the antichrist prior to the return of Christ. Thus, in the prophetic language of the prophecy, it is revealed that the fourth empire was to be in power at the first advent of Christ and also at His second advent:

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This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with [brittle] clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with [brittle] clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (Daniel 2:36-45)

These two prophecies, one from the seventh chapter of Daniel and the other from the second chapter of Daniel, reveal the same truth: from the age of Daniel until the second coming of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom on this earth, there will be four Gentile world empires which will have a relationship with Israel. It is important to understand that Israel's history, prophetically speaking, is defined by another prophecy given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel: *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and the prophecy, and to anoint the most holy* (Daniel 9:24-25, emphasis mine). Therefore, with regard to the Jews, we are only concerned with Gentile empires that fall within the parameters of these seventy weeks. Further, because the prophecy

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goes on to say that Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself, we know that Christ was crucified at the end of the sixty-ninth week of the prophecy.

When Gabriel gave the prophecy to Daniel it was shrouded in mystery. So at that time it was not possible to know there would be a parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of the prophecy. Neither was it possible to know that each week of the prophecy would be seven years in duration. However, with the crucifixion of Christ four hundred and eighty-three years (69 X 7) after the decree of Cyrus to restore and to build Jerusalem, the time elements of the prophecy are now understood: the first sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy were sequential and the seventieth week is separated from the others by the period of the church age. This separation of the seventieth week from the sixty-nine weeks is not directly stated in the prophecy, but it certainly is implied:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks [a total of 69 X 7]: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince [Vespasian in 70 A.D.] that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

And he [the eighth ruler of the fourth empire (Revelations 17:9-11)] shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. (Daniel 9:25-27, emphasis mine)

Therefore we are presently in a parenthetical period of time between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of the prophecy. This is the period of time of our Lord's seven parables. It is the church age which was revealed prophetically in the feast of Pentecost. This feast was observed between the first three feasts of the Jews (which were fulfilled in our Lord's first advent)

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and the last three feasts of the Jews (which will be fulfilled in our Lord's second advent). The parenthetical period of the church age will end with the first resurrection (probably at the feast of trumpets), and the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy will begin when the antichrist makes a covenant with Israel for the final week of the prophecy (Daniel 9:27).

Even though Julius Caesar came to power more than two thousand years ago, Rome is still in power, not so much as a political empire but as a religious empire. Despite her present non-political status, Rome still wields great political clout in the world, and she shall reign over the nations of world once again with the advent of the antichrist.

In the seventh chapter of Daniel, the fourth empire was described as being *diverse* from the other empires. *Diverse* is a translation of the Hebrew word *shena*. *Shena* comes from *Yashen*, which can mean *to remain a long time*. Thus long-lasting is an apt description of the Roman empire. It existed as a political empire for more than five hundred years; but prior to its political decline, the empire and the church merged during the reign of Constantine in the fourth century A.D. This was the actual beginning of the Roman Catholic Church, even though the Roman church claims a succession of popes all the way back to the apostle Peter.

The parable of a net cast into the sea has its fulfillment in the latter days of this last world empire. It is about reaping a harvest from among the Gentile nations of the world, because in the typology of the Scriptures the sea represents the Gentile nations of the world. Thus this parable is an allusion to gathering a harvest of souls out of the nations of the world. While it is the ministry of the church to harvest souls from the nations of the world through the preaching of the gospel, this ingathering (by virtue of casting a net into the sea) seems to present the method used

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to accomplish mass evangelism.

This method of preaching began to arise late in the nineteenth century, with evangelists like Billy Sunday, Dwight L. Moody, and about the middle of the twentieth century, Billy Graham. The campaigns of these, and many others like them, have stressed results by getting men, women, boys and girls to *make a decision for Christ*. The preaching of these men, at times, seems to have been more about reformation than salvation. Even so the gospel has gone forth and according to the parable of the net cast into the sea, both good and bad have been enclosed within the net.

When Billy Graham began his evangelistic career in Los Angeles during the 1950s, he insisted upon cooperative meetings of everyone under the canopy of Christianity within the area of the meetings. No one was to be excluded on the basis of doctrine. This has been Mr. Graham's *modus operandi* ever since. With this method and with a strong emphasis upon changing one's life, as well as some emphasis upon the gospel, the invitation has been given; and with the efforts of the *personal workers* in the audience, myriads of individual have been drawn into the net to make *decisions for Christ*, whether God gave the increase or not. Thus, according to the parable, it will take the angels to discern those who were redeemed from those who were not.

The parable of the net cast into the sea shows the results of those who have been deceived by two doctrines, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who taught the nation of Israel to violate their separation from the idolatrous people around them. Billy Graham has taught the church the same thing. Thus there is an indictment against this practice in the book of the Revelation, where our Lord said: *I have a few*

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things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate (Revelation 2:14-15).

The spiritual fornication of the nation of Israel, due to the counsel of Balaam, resulted in the ultimate apostasy of the nation of Israel. By the same token, the two doctrines, mentioned in the indictment of the church at Pergamos, are producing the same results in the church. These two doctrines are very subtle. Like everything else that is contrary to God, they have their roots in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and find ready acceptance in carnal minds -- minds ignorant of the Word of God.

The doctrine of Balaam usually calls for unity for unity's sake. It defends itself by indicating that a separation on the basis of doctrine undermines God's instructions to the church that we are to love one another. It totally disregards John's instructions to the church: *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of [the]*

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truth, and the spirit of [the] error (I John 4:1-6, emphasis mine).

The second false doctrine that seeks to undermine the faith, which will result in the apostasy of the church, is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. This doctrine has been misunderstood by many to be the difference between the laity and the clergy in the Roman church. This was the position of Dr. C. I. Scofield. Even so this interpretation does not fit the truth of the Scriptures. The word, *Nicolaitanes* is a compound of two Greek words: *nikao*, which means *to conquer*, and *laos*, which means *the people*. The term, Nicolaitanes, means the opposite of what Doctor Scofield believed. It means *the people rule*. This meaning finds expression all through the Word of God.

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram is a prime example of the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. God called Moses and Aaron to rule and to lead His people, Israel, but Korah, Dathan and Abiram *rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?* (Numbers 16:2-3)

Korah placed himself and his company above the authority of the Word of God, and God showed His displeasure with this action by sending fire from heaven, which destroyed the two hundred and fifty princes, and the remainder of the rebels were swallowed up of the earth. Then God reestablished the authority of Moses and Aaron with the budding of Aaron's rod.

God has always used individual men, called of God, to lead His people. The Scripture says

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the people are like sheep having no shepherd. The idea of congregational rule within the church of Jesus Christ has subjected the man of God, who knows the Word of God, to the whims of the people, who by comparison know very little of the Word of God. The desires of the people, along with their lack of understanding, leads the people away from the truth of the Word of God. In the average church of today, the people have total control of the church, and the pastor does not dare to incite their displeasure.

It is commonly believed that the salvation of souls, within a particular ministry, automatically stamps the approval of God upon the ministry. This is a misconceived idea. God honors His Word no matter who preaches it. It is the Word of God and the Spirit of God which effects salvation, not the schemes of men. In fact the apostle Paul wrote:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)

It should be evident, by the improper method suggested by the use of a net cast into the sea, the salvation of souls is not an approval of the method. In fact this method has added appreciably to the apostasy of the later-day church: seeing that the net encloses both good and bad fish, and both are accounted as believers within the church. Consequently the increased apostasy is a sign of the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [apostasy] first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. (II Thessalonians 2:1-3)

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As we race toward the end of this church age, the apostasy within the church of Jesus Christ increases. The errors of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes are both very prevalent: doctrine is disdained and the people rule. All of the failures of Israel, which were written for the church's admonition and instruction, are ignored. The church races along the same course that Israel ran, making the same mistakes and exhibiting the same arrogance.

These parables have given us a picture of the flesh and the Spirit in the church age. After the final parable of a net cast into the sea, Jesus spoke unto His disciples and said: *Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old* (Matthew 13:51-52).

With our Lord, I wish to ask the same question, *Have you understood all of these things?* I hope your answer will also be, *Yes, we understand.* If so, those of you who are in the ministry, heed the admonition of the Lord. Draw from your treasure things old and new. Teach your people the Word of God. Teach your people the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. Teach them the difference between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Teach your people to live by faith, by heeding the Word of God and rejecting the counsel of man that is contrary to the Word of God. Teach your people that Jesus said: *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life* (John 6:63). Finally, be faithful to the truth of the Word of God that you may present your people as a *chaste virgin to Christ.* May the Lord bless those of you who love His Word and long for His coming!