

Revelation Lesson 36
Pergamos: The Lax Church (Condemnation)

Revelation 2:14-15 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac 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 Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Last time we noted some pretty powerful compliments from our Lord and Saviour to these folks at Pergamos, especially in light of where they were living. Now, unlike the Church at Smyrna, but like the Church at Ephesus, the Lord renders some words of criticism in this Condemnation of two forms of Doctrine. Notice:

But I have a few things against thee, - At Ephesus we were told that Christ had “somewhat against thee.” Now we observe that the Church at Ephesus had lost their first love. The late Oliver B Greene said: “It does not seem to be such a terrible sin just to love the Lord Jesus a little less; but when our love cools, that always opens the door for other things to happen. If we give the devil an inch he will take a mile. A believer cannot do business with the devil in any form, regardless of how insignificant or little it may seem. Always remember that when a minister begins to compromise in the least, the compromising will spread and grow.” That's the way the Church at Pergamos arrived where they were. When compromised on one issue, the enemy saw that the way was open and that the method worked. If it ain't broke don't fix it. So then another issue was raised, the pressure was applied a little bit more and another compromise was gained until now, under the inspection of the Lord Jesus Christ there is not found one problem but multiple ones. Remember I told you that it seemed like they were getting “an early gift?” Think about Matthew 5:23-24 from God's perspective. Jesus says: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Perhaps after hearing Christ's Condemnation, they needed to repent before they could receive those words of commendation? I know I would....

because thou hast there them – Notice the WHY. Why does Jesus have “*a few things against*” His Church at Pergamos? It is a “people” problem. This isn't a “kick-em-out-and-be-done” issue as some may think. This people problem is one of the Doctrinal beliefs they hold and practice. Again, this criticism is directed at the whole Congregation but the problem lies with “them” that hold and practice false doctrine. If the condemnation is applied to the whole, then the answer must be answered as a whole. This is the whole reason for Christ outlining “Church Discipline” in Matthew 18:15-17. Christ desires His Church to have “...the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (Philippians 2:2) Thus we must “have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) or the Bible and its Sound Doctrines properly taught as Paul told Titus in Titus 2:1 “*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:*” Doctrine should be taught by the Pastor-Teacher for Paul told Titus again in Titus 1:9 that he should be: “*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*”

Evidently, it seems to me that the Pastor (or angel) of the Church at Pergamos was too busy ensuring that the Church held proper relations with the city officials and officials of Rome and compromising the very Doctrines he was instructed to teach, otherwise these “few things” which Christ had against the Church would have been run out of the Congregation. We observed back in Revelation 2:6 that the Church at Ephesus hated (note not the people) the “deeds of the Nicolaitans.” Those deeds came from their doctrine. Frank Outlaw (SC Founder of Bi-Lo) said: “Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your

actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become character; watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.” This is the sentiments of James (the half-brother of Jesus) in James 4:1-2 “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” What they were taught, became real in their deeds. Is not this also what Solomon says in Proverbs 23:7a “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...”

that hold – While this Congregation was lauded for they “holdest fast my name.” Which we saw meant: “To have in one's power, be master of, i.e., to hold, hold fast, not to let go!” Well the same word used in the Greek language for “holdest” is the same Greek word used here for “hold.” Thus we see something very intriguing next, which LaHaye describes as follows: “although their theological doctrine was correct, their practical doctrines were radically evil. These false doctrines fell into two main categories.” Christ now condemns those who – in the same way and manner as they held fast to His Name – held to those two categories of the “doctrine of Balaam” and as we shall see in the next verse, “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.”

the doctrine of Balaam, - What exactly is the doctrine of Balaam? J. Vernon McGee says the following: *"The doctrine of Balaam" is different from the **error of Balaam** (see Jude 1:11), which revealed that Balaam thought that God would curse Israel because they were sinners. It is also different from the **way of Balaam** (see 2 Peter 2:15), which was covetousness. But here in the verse before us, it is the doctrine or teaching of Balaam. He taught Balac the way to corrupt Israel by intermarriage with the Moabite women. This introduced into the nation of Israel both idolatry and fornication.*” But why did Balaam do this? Who was Balaam anyway?

While we do not have time tonight to review everything concerning Balaam a few points are in order, to bring us up to speed on this whole situation. The story of Balaam (name means: *destroyer of the people*) begins in Numbers 22. He was a magician or soothsayer who lived in Aram within the city of Pethor on the Euphrates River. Many people said (for years) that Balaam was “just another of those Bible Fairy Tales!” All that came to a screeching halt in 1967.

At an archaeological excavation near Deir Alla in Jordan a “house” was discovered. On one of the walls, there was found various inscriptions about one named: Balaam, the son of Beor. In 1989, Professor William H. Shea wrote an article entitled: *The Inscribed Tablets From Tell Deir 'Alla* in The Biblical Research Institute published by Andrews University Seminary Studies. In the article Shea said: *"Thanks to the Deir 'Alla Tablets, we can recognize that this locale was where Balaam's home sanctuary of Pethor was located. Of all the places in the entire Near East where his memory might have been preserved, this location is obviously the most likely because of its being the very spot where he lived and exercised his prophetic ministry. We cannot attribute the writing of these tablets to Balaam himself, however, for he was killed before the Israelites crossed the Jordan (Numbers 31:23); Most likely there was something resembling a non-Israelite school of the prophets, the staff of which included Balaam for a time..."*

We see from the Archaeological site that Balaam was described as a prophet of the Goddess Ishtar. In the Bible he is seen as a misguided prophet of God at times. We could best describe him as someone who knew the Lord, and like Solomon, was drawn away from God's service (2 Peter 2:15).

Balaam was enticed by King Balak of Moab, to come curse Israel. Balaam consulted God, God said no. Balak “upped the ante” so-to-speak and Balaam begged God again and God in His display of permissive will, allowed Balaam to go, but say only what He instructed. Along the way, one of the most famous episodes in Bible history occurred: Balaam's Ass began to speak, after the prophet struck the animal repeatedly. Once he arrived, Balak took Balaam upon a high mountain (a shrine to an idol) and there Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, but God's spirit had him pour out a

blessing which enraged Balak. Again and again the scene was repeated, but no curse was pronounced. It is in this text that we learn that the events of Numbers 25-31 came about due to Balaam's teaching! In the end, Balaam was with the unbelievers and was slain amongst the natives of the land who opposed Israel (Joshua 13:22). It is from Balaam we have the "Star Prophecy" in Numbers 24:17 which would be a signpost for the "Wise Men" on their way to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, some 2 years after His birth.

who taught Balac – Here we see how the doctrine (or teaching) of Balaam was transmitted. He taught Balac. Now who is this fellow? Understand that in the New Testament we usually find many Old Testament names spelled differently. This is due primarily to the translation of names found in Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek. For example the Old Testament "Noah" is seen as "Noe" in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. While "Noah" reappears in the writings of Paul (Hebrews) and Peter (1 & 2 Peter).

Thus we see that the Balac of our text verse is Balak, one of the kings of Moab. Balak is found in 41 verses in the Bible (this includes the variant spelling).

to cast a stumblingblock – The word stumblingblock (now understood to be 2 words) is translated to us from the Greek word: SKANDALON (G4625) which means: "*any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall, (a stumbling block, occasion of stumbling) i.e. a rock which is a cause of stumbling.*"

Christians are warned by Paul the Apostle in Romans 14:13 to "...not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way." also in 1 Corinthians 8:9 he admonishes us to: "...take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."

Thus, for a Christian to knowingly cast a stumbling block in front of another believer is a serious *faux pas*.

before the children of Israel, - In the history of Israel, we find a breakdown of what the doctrine or "teaching" of Balaam was. It essentially centered around 2 points, which are connected to Idolatry (Spiritual Adultery against God) and Fornication (Physical Adultery against self & others). More on these two ideas in a moment. When you get down to the essential idea behind Balaam's doctrine (and stumbling block) you find that he instructed Balak to somehow get the Hebrews into such wicked living, so that God would have to punish His children. In other words since he could only bless the Jews, there had to be a "back door" to a curse somewhere.

This "back door" is revealed in the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but in the Old Testament all we see is the actions of the Hebrews in Numbers 25:1-3 "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel."

to eat things sacrificed unto idols, - Why is this mentioned? Why does eating "things sacrificed unto idols" matter? Historically, the Jews were forbidden under the old Mosaic Law to eat "unclean" animals and to eat only "clean" animals. Understand that God had already outlined which ones were "clean" and "unclean" for such is seen in the animals pairs as they board Noah's Ark in Genesis 7:2 & 8. things offered to idols.

To understand the connection made here in Revelation 2:14 we must understand that under the Old Testament Law, even touching the meat of swine made one ritually/ceremonially unclean (Deuteronomy 14:8). This detail further insulated the Israelites from pagan practices. The Canaanites

kept herds of swine and sacrificed them to idols. The connection between swine and pagan worship became so strong that the prophet Isaiah equated the sacrificial offering of pig's blood with murder—both are called “abominations” in Isaiah 66:3.

Thus the Hebrews would not eat food offered to idols because it would be “ceremonially” contaminated. If such an one WAS eating such foods, then in the Old Testament it pointed to involvement in Idolatry.

In the New Testament, Paul the Apostle, explained that all food was clean (Romans 14) and that food offered to idols could be eaten by Christians (1 Corinthians 8) but in both cases, Paul warned about stumbling blocks. Since many people are not Spiritually mature, he introduces the “Law of Christian Liberty” which essentially shows the believer, that even though he may be right (in this case it involved eating any food) to exercise such right and knowingly cause another to sin, etc. would be sinful in itself, thus the more mature believer ought to refrain from such action out of love for the “weaker brother.”

and to commit fornication. - The word “fornication” essentially refers to “any sexual relations among those not married to each other.” The Greek word behind our English Word is PORNEUO (G4203) to which the following meanings can be applied: “to prostitute one's body to the lust of another; to give one's self to unlawful sexual intercourse; to commit fornication.” As a metaphor, it is used to describe the following action: “to permit one's self to be drawn away by another into idolatry.” This Greek word and its root: PORNEIA (G4202) (which is also translated in the Bible as Fornication) is one of the etymological roots where we get the word Pornography from.

In the historical case of Balaam, his “doctrine” involved women. Even the smartest guys fall for women. Women can be used for God's glory or against God's plan. Just read your Bible and see. Now, in the case of the downfall of men, see Solomon for starters. He had 1,000 women at his beck and call. He tried going after 1,001 in the Song of Solomon (he's the pimp daddy in there folks, he ain't the hero! I don't care what preachers out there say!). The Bible plainly says in 1 Kings 11:3-4 “And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.”

What happened in the case of Solomon, happened to hundreds of the men of the children of Israel in Numbers 25 – 31. The scheme of the wily prophet worked. Under the direction of Balak, the women of Moab caused the children of Israel to sin in Idolatry and Fornication. Thus Balaam was more guilty than Balak, for the prophet (through the hand of Satan) was the instigator of the coming fall of Israel. There was a signal Judgment inflicted upon 24,000 who sinned (Numbers 25:9). Some believe that the Bible contains an error in the account of this event in 1 Corinthians 10:8 “*Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*” There is no error, for Numbers 25:9 tells us the sum total slain by the Judgment of God. 1 Corinthians 10:8 informs us that 23,000 out of 24,000 died in one day!! Wow!

Now, fornication is applied not only in the sexual sense in the Bible but it is also used in a spiritual sense. Oliver B. Greene said: “For the young child of God, any object, any person, place or thing that occupies the place God should occupy in the heart and life of the individual, is an idol, and thus becomes Idolatry (1 John 5:21).” Illicit intercourse with the world is spiritual fornication (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). In the Old Testament, Israel was charged with adultery in having fellowship with the Gentiles (Jeremiah 3:8). Israel was [considered as being] married to Jehovah; thus to be friends with the enemies

of Jehovah was adultery. In the New Testament, the church is charged with fornication in allowing friendship with the world (Revelation 2:21). [Recall that] the New Testament Church is not yet married to the Bridegroom. The marriage will take place immediately after the Rapture. Thus, for the church to show friendship with the world is spiritual fornication. We are commanded to “Love not the world...come ye out from among them....touch not the unclean...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness...abstain from the appearance of evil.” When a believer participates in the things of the world, that participation is spiritual fornication!”

So hast thou also – The inclusion (by the Holy Ghost) of the wording: also indicates the Nicolaitans are in the same category as those who held to the Doctrine of Balaam. Many of them could be viewed as one and the same.

them that hold – This bodes the same meaning as I spoke of in the previous verse. I will add however that in both cases these groups of people who “hold” to the Doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans ALSO (as it will become clear next week) have the power to NOT hold to these teachings. They have the power to STOP HOLDING to these false teachings! Yet we see that for the time being they continue to tenaciously cling to these teachings, as many still do in modern Churches today.

the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, - We reviewed the deeds of the Nicolaitans earlier and essentially, the Church at Ephesus hated their beliefs and they were most likely “ran out of town.” Among their travels they must have stumbled upon Pergamos where they would infect many there now. (How sad such it is).

which thing I hate. - Some people today only see God's “goodness.” By that I mean they think Jesus is a Molly-Coddly Hippie who spreads “Peace and Love” not “War and Hate.” While the Bible declares emphatically that: “God is Love” (1 John 4:8) we must not forget that it is only one of God's Characteristics. Among those other attributes are His: Righteousness and Holiness. There are things that God hates. When God “hates” this is not from any type of sin, for God cannot sin. But wouldn't you like to ensure that you and I are not involved in something that God hates and thus fulfill James 4:4 “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” While this list is a very detailed and comprehensive, I will refrain from calling it an exhaustive list, for there may be something I missed, but as best as I could here are the things the Bible declares that there are (at least) 43 things that God hates:

1. Sodomy (called Homosexuality) (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:20-32).
2. Bestiality (Leviticus 18:23)
3. Idols, and the materials used to make idols (Deuteronomy 7:25; 16:22)
4. Blemished sacrifices (Deuteronomy 17:1)
5. Worshipping the sun, moon or stars (Deuteronomy 17:3-4)
6. Divination (Deuteronomy 18:10)
7. Astrology (Deuteronomy 18:10)
8. Enchanters (Deuteronomy 18:10)
9. Witches (Deuteronomy 18:10)
10. Charmers (Deuteronomy 18:11)
11. Wizards (Deuteronomy 18:11)
12. Necromancers (Deuteronomy 18:11)
13. Transvestitism (or cross-dressing) (Deuteronomy 22:5)
14. The hire of a whore (Deuteronomy 23:18)
15. Remarriage to a former wife after she has been married to another man (Deuteronomy 24:4)
16. Dishonest scales (Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

17. Workers of iniquity/sin (Psalm 5:5; Matthew 7:22-23)
18. The wicked (Psalm 11:5)
19. Those who love violence (Psalm 11:5)
20. The froward [perverse] (Proverbs 3:32)
21. A proud look (Proverbs 6:16-17)
22. A lying tongue (Proverbs 6:17)
23. Hands that shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:17)
24. A heart that devises wicked imaginations (Proverbs 6:18)
25. Feet that are swift in running to mischief (Proverbs 6:18)
26. A false witness who speaks lies (Proverbs 6:19)
27. Anyone who sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:19)
28. Lying lips (Proverbs 12:22)
29. The sacrifices of the wicked (Proverbs 15:8)
30. The ways of the wicked (Proverbs 15:9)
31. The thoughts of the wicked (Proverbs 15:26)
32. The proud in heart (Proverbs 16:5)
33. Those who justify the wicked (Proverbs 17:15)
34. Those who condemn the just (Proverbs 17:15)
35. Vain sacrifices (Isaiah 1:13)
36. Feasts as Israel celebrated them (Isaiah 1:14; Amos 5:21)
37. Robbery for burnt offering (Isaiah 61:8)
38. Idolatry (Jeremiah 44:2-4)
39. Evil plans against neighbors (Zechariah 8:17)
40. False oaths (Zechariah 8:17)
41. Esau (or his attitude of carelessness over his birthright) (Malachi 1:1-3; Romans 9:13)
42. Divorce (Malachi 2:14-16)
43. The deeds of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15)