

Finishing Well

Lesson #34

Spiritual Warfare in Compromising Church
Pergamos: Undiscerning Tolerance
Doctrine Of Balaam

Aug. 30, 2023

Rev. 2:12-17 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Problem: They were being soft and tolerant to error and false doctrines.

Warning: Heresy and error will rise up in the church when Christians stray from the pure teachings found in God's Word.

From the earliest days of the Lord's church, a constant threat had been posed by those who want to change God's grace into something it is not.

❖ The attempted changes always relate to either Licentiousness or Legalism.

Satan's Plan: Infiltrate The Church:

Jude 1:3b-4 exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, UNGODLY men, TURNING the grace of our God into LASCIVIOUSNESS, and denying the only Lord God, & our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ungodly: asebes = irreverent, wicked;

➤ While they profess to serve God, they live contrary to His purposes.

Turn the grace of God: pervert grace; twisting it so it becomes a pretext for sin.

➤ NOT an escape from: It is AN EXCUSE for our former lusts.

➤ TURN = modified, something added. It comes from a root word meaning to prostrate truth = to lay truth on the ground and make it something passive.

➤ Because they wouldn't forsake their sin, they laid the truth flat and trampled on it, removing all its meaning and power. [Bitterness, lying, gossip, etc.]

As Isaiah cried, "Truth is fallen in the street...Yea, truth fails." [Isaiah 59:14-15].

Lasciviousness = aselgeia Used 10x in NT; Latin - lascivia; runaway passion & lust

➤ lacking in moral discipline, having no regard for accepted moral standards.

➤ casting off all restraints; represents all that is filthy, degrading, lewd & obscene.

Peter warned against "The Way Of Balaam"

II Pet. 2:1-3a But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

- Peter gets to the root of their destructive heresy: Denying the Lord who bought them.
Denying authority of God's Word

² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

- Pernicious: having a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way.

Note: This proves many people would rather follow the false than the true, the sensual rather than the spiritual.

³ And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you:

- Feigned = plastos = plastic = words that can be twisted to mean anything you want

II Pet. 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam..., who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

- Merchandising one's gifts and ministry for the purpose of making money.
- Using the spiritual to gain the material. [I Thess. 2:5-6; I Tim. 6:3-21]
- His readiness to prostitute his high spiritual gifts and privileges for the wages of unrighteousness =
 - ❖ being willing to preach something contrary to God's Word for personal gain.

Jude warned against "The Error of Balaam."

Jude 1:11 ran greedily [rushed] after the error of Balaam for reward or profit.

Error of Balaam: His willingness to compromise his own standards of morality and truth in order "greedily" to accommodate those of his pagan patrons.

- Covetousness and an immoderate love of money

If Balaam had printed a "business card" it would have read:

- "Prophet for hire." He would simply make a prophecy for the highest bidder.
- You give him the money; you get the prophecy you want.

I Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

- Root of all evil, the bane of religion and the source of heresy
- It is insatiable and is not stopped in false teachers.
- It is a damnable sin and excludes people from being saved.
- It dishonors the truth of God's Word.

Balaam was misusing his authority and his prophetic gift for personal financial gain.

- Thought he could get away with prostituting his gifts.

After 38 years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel was about to enter Canaan. However, they were encountering conflicts from different groups of people. One such group was Moab. Numbers 22:25, 31: Balak, king of the Moabites, tried to hire [money & rewards] Balaam to curse Israel. King Balak's offer was one Balaam could not refuse. Num. 22:17

For I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. Offered money & a promotion.

Num. 23:13-14 Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Pisgah where again they offered sacrifices to their gods. The fact that Balaam participated in these pagan occult rituals shows the wickedness of his heart. He spoke the Word of God and longed for a righteous death, yet he thought nothing of using enchantments and consorting with Satan. [24:1] He was a double-minded man whose chief desire was to make as much money as possible by marketing his skills.

- He was hired by the enemy to curse God's people, but God stood in his way 4 times.

Balaam had been using the wrong approach. He was trying to get the unchanging God to change His plans and purposes. That would never happen. God would never go back on His Word.

Numbers 23:19. "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

So Balaam now devises a devious plan that seeks to "use" God's faithfulness to His Word for his own personal gain.

- When the frontal assault failed, Balaam took a back-door approach. Jude 1:4
- ❖ It was impossible to persuade God to forsake His purpose of blessing Israel, but history had proven that it would be very easy to turn Israel from the right path by rebelling against God's Word, thereby incurring His wrath.
- ❖ All Balaam had to do was to tempt the Israelites to sin in such a way that they would fall under the curse of God as laid out in the law.

It was an ingenious plan, and incredibly simple. The Israelites could be seduced to follow other gods, and this would anger God to the point they would incur the curses God had pronounced on those who practiced such sins!

Recall: Pergamos was tolerating the Doctrine of Balaam. Jesus comes with His sharp 2-edged sword. He called them back to the right path or He is ready for judgment.

- Balaam doubled down on his determination to get rich by enticing people to sin!
- He persuades King Balak to have the women of Moab and Midian to seduce the Israelite men to commit sexual sin and to worship idols.
- When the Israelite men yield to the seduction of the women, commit sexual immorality and worship idols, their own God will have to curse them. He will punish them.

Balaam, being a prophet, knew how to seduce Israel, so she would temporarily fall under God's judgment. His tactics cost the lives of 24,000 Israelites.

Truth: To deliberately and purposefully oppose the will of God is to make God your adversary.

II Pet. 2:15 Balaam's "way" is a choice to promote falsehood for financial reasons.

Jude 1:11 Balaam's "error" was his willingness to accommodate pagan beliefs out of greed.

Jude 1:4 The sin of those "who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality."

Putting these ideas together gives a clear view of the doctrine of Balaam.

- It is the attitude that one can be fully cooperative with the world and still serve God.
- Teaches compromise; forget you are called to be separate and holy. Lev. 20:26
- Makes believers indistinguishable from the unbelieving world Matthew 5:13
- A belief that "a little sin" doesn't hurt Galatians 5:9
 - ❖ especially if there's some financial or personal benefit involved I Timothy 6:5
- It's the attitude that treats sin as "no big deal." Grace covers it. License To Sin

The Doctrine of Balaam > Teaching Contrary To The Revealed Word Of God

Philosophy: If You Can't Curse Them; Corrupt Them.

John warned against "The Doctrine of Balaam."

Rev. 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block [snare, trap] before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication [sexual immorality].

- Stumbling block = *Skandalon* = can be used to describe a trap, more specifically the trigger of the trap upon which the bait is laid.
- Refers to the "trap" by which a person is drawn into error or sin.
- The bait which brought about the downfall of Israel was the desire of the men for sexual relations with the women of Moab.

When Balaam could not successfully curse the people of God, he seduced them into unbridled, sensual living by dangling the prostitutes of Moab before the men of Israel.

- Use his own teaching authority to persuade God's people that it was all right for them to compromise these standards > to commit fornication with their idol-worshipping enemies.
- You can violate your separated position and get away with it.

Balaam told King Balak the fastest way to destroy Israel would be to corrupt the nation by having the people defile themselves with the heathen nations around them.

The ultimate goal: Cause them to worship the pagan gods.

Weaken their allegiance to Jehovah God.

- His argument: You are God's chosen people.
- He turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. [Jude 1:4] Entice them to sin.

Num. 25:1-3 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, (Unknown to the Israelites, a spiritual attack against them had been waged by the Moabites and the Midianites, who had hired Balaam to persuade God to curse the nation Israel.) and the people began:

- To commit harlotry with the women of Moab.
- They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and
- The people ate and bowed down to their gods.

So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

- yoked with or partnered with - the Canaanite god Baal.
- Balaam showed Balak how to get in the back door.
- II Pet. 2:1+ False prophets in Israel came in among the nation and secretly introduced destructive heresies just as Balaam did.

This feast, involving idolatry and abominable immorality would be a flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with God. Israel's consecration and separation unto God was completely obliterated when the Moabite women committed fornication with the Israelite men, and they ate flesh offered to idols. This Scheme Appealed To The Flesh.

To put a stop to these sins and stay the hand of God's judgment upon the entire camp of Israel, Moses was instructed to slay every Israelite who had "*joined himself to Baal-peor.*" Because of their sins, twenty-four thousand Israelites perished under God's judgment. *The doctrine of Balaam:* The fact that the Israelites were the covenant people of God. This covenant could not be broken. Consequently, the Israelites could sin with immunity.

However, such was not the case. It was true that the covenant established between God and Israel could not be broken; but it was not true that Israel could sin with immunity. God's wrath was manifested because of the sins of His people, and the thousands of Israelites who succumbed to the counsel of Balaam were overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling.

Micah, a faithful prophet, addressed the rulers, priests and prophets of Israel. [Micah 3:9-12] He accused them of numerous sins: her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, her prophets divine for money. [Micah 3:11]

- While doing these evil deeds, they claimed to be serving the Lord.

"We are depending on the Lord. Is He not among us? Then nothing evil can happen to us."

- Hypocrisy of the worst kind.
- Their ignorance of the LORD's character and the terms of His covenant gave them a false confidence.

"Since we're Jews, God's chosen people and sharers in His covenant, the Lord will never permit anything evil to happen to us. Even if we sin, He will never abandon us to the enemy."

Micah urged God's people to "remember" Balaam and his tragic end.

Num. 31:8 Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.

The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:28-29a: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; ²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication:

1. It sucks you back into idolatry.
2. It is an abuse of your Christian freedom.
3. It makes weaker brothers stumble.
4. It conjures all the old life patterns.

Note: Some decades later many are teaching God tolerates this. License to sin

How Does This Relate to Pergamos?

Note: Pergamum comes from two words, per, which has the idea of "completely, thoroughly," and gamos, "marriage." The church at Pergamum:

1. Began to lose their pilgrim character
2. Becoming thoroughly married to the world.

Some in this church: We don't need to be separate. We can mix the old patterns, the old morals, the old idolatry with the new Christianity. You can be a Christian and worship idols, commit fornication with a heathen priest or priestess at the temple. You can attend the debauchery, the orgies, the festivals and the feasts and still pay your homage to Jesus.

"You need to be friendly to Rome. What harm is there in putting a pinch of incense on the altar and affirming your loyalty to Caesar?"

Antipas refused and was martyred. Others took the easy way out.

The compromise made them welcome in the Roman guilds and protected them from Roman persecution, but it cost them their testimony and crown.

The second generation of Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for nearly 40 years. They had eaten manna and water, with almost no exceptions. They had seen MANY die due to rebellion and unbelief. God had just given 2 major victories over Sihon & Og.

They are about to embark on the conquest of the Promised Land, their inheritance.

Question: When are we very vulnerable to the enemy? Just after a victory!

Num. 25:1a Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove,

Remained = #03427 = yashab = to dwell, remain, sit down, abide, to stay, one's abode.

Yashab is translated married 6 times in the OT which gives us a sense of the meaning of yashab and the danger in which Israel had placed itself!

This verb is not the same verb as to "camp" which is what they should have been doing!

- Camped = #02583 = chanah is used repeatedly of Israel setting up camp in their wilderness journey.

The Holy Spirit does not use that word in this passage which is their last stop before crossing into the Promised Land! Instead, He chose yashab and not the verb chanah which means to pitch a tent, which is quite different than abiding or tarrying as implicit in yashab! Israel should have camped instead of remaining or tarrying but they remained at Acacia Grove for a long time before crossing the Jordan and entering their Promised Land.

Suddenly the "welcome wagon" arrives at the Israelites' camp. Friendly neighbors come by to welcome them to the neighborhood and extend an invitation to come to their worship feast. Did the Israelites realize: *to share such a meal with the Moabites was to join them in the worship of their gods?*

The Canaanites incorporated sexual immorality into their religion, as an "act of worship." By participating in the pagan sacrificial meals, and by engaging in sexual relations with the Moabites as an act of worship, the Israelites both committed sexual immorality and engaged in spiritual harlotry.

The judgment of God fell upon His people. He sent a plague which killed 24,000 Israelites.

Consider: Any teaching that makes it easy and permissible to sin is false doctrine which is compared to a cancerous growth in:

II Tim. 2:15-18 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.¹⁶ But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.¹⁷ And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸ Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

- The cancer of compromise weakens our witness and saps our spiritual strength. Then we wonder why we are blunt instruments for the Lord!

Does The Doctrine of Balaam Affect Me?

1. We have been saved by grace through faith.
2. Nothing can alter our salvation or destination.
3. We now possess eternal life, which can never be taken from us.
4. Because of the unchangeable nature of the life that we presently possess, many reason we can conduct our lives in any manner we choose, and it will make no difference.

I Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Remember our privileged position in Christ. We are temporary sojourners and enabled by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Holy Word, we must diligently practice our position by continually making the choice to abstain, to create some space, to push away from, to separate from those strong, enticing, ensnaring fleshly lusts which continually bombard our hearts and minds and continually wage a strategic struggle against our souls.

God does not save me by His grace so I can live in disgrace!

This marked the last camping-ground of Israel before they crossed the Jordan to begin the conquest of Canaan. Here the people fell into the snare set for them by the satanic counsel of Balaam, who brought upon them greater evil than all his prohibited curses could have done. God judged both Israel and Balaam.

So close yet so far! Israel made a fatal departure from the Holy One to yoke themselves instead to the unholy "god" Baal of Peor. They were about to receive the bountiful blessings of God in the promised land. Instead, they turned to the despicable fertility rites of the debased Midianites.

Just like the Israelites who were called and saved for a specific, revealed purpose, Christians have been saved for a specific, revealed purpose.

1. Every Christian is enrolled in a race.

I Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. So they *do it* to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way as not to *run* aimlessly; I box in such a way, as to avoid hitting air; ²⁷ but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

2. Every Christian is engaged in a conflict

Ephesians 6:10-18 Full Armor of God

The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam being promulgated in churches today is the teaching: Future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ's finished work on Calvary and the Christian's positional standing "*in Christ*."

In this respect, all Christians — regardless of their conduct during the present time — will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the kingdom.

However, that which is clearly taught throughout the Word of God is to the contrary.

J.C. Ryle: There are no promises in the Lord Jesus Christ's epistles to the 7 churches except to those who **OVERCOME**.

The enemy, Satan, is doing all within his power to bring defeat in the lives of Christians. Satan's main objective in the present warfare is to prevent Christians from qualifying for crowns and thus positions of rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom.

3. The goal set before every Christian is to win the race, be victorious in the conflict.

Phil. 3:13b-14 but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

God has made provision for Christians so at the end of the race they might say with Paul,

II Tim. 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness* which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

ALL OF US are but one step away from "taking a detour at Acacia Grove."

Rev. 3:11 Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.