

CHRIST Speaks to Churches

Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

by Theodore H. Epp

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CHAPTER FOUR

CHRIST SPEAKS TO PERGAMOS

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 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 Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Revelation 2:12-17).

The church of Pergamos was located in a great center of idol worship. The idolatry practiced in that locality was largely the worship of nature. Outstanding among the creatures worshipped was the serpent. This may help explain some of the references in the letter.

The Saviour describes Himself here as the One who has the sharp sword with two edges. This is a symbol speaking of discernment and executive power. According to the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation the sword was not in His hands but in His mouth. Thus it has to do with His Word - rather than execution. CHRIST words to Pergamos were: **"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest."** GOD knew where they lived and He knows where we live. Today, we are living in a world of wealth and fashion. Mammon has become our GOD. Our emphasis is upon the material things of life rather than the spiritual. It would seem as though many of us serve GOD only when it is convenient. This is true even of many who are in full-time service for the Lord.

Here in the United States we have what we call separation of church and state. We have no state church. According to this principle, the church cannot dictate to the government neither can the government dictate to the church. On the other hand, real Christianity should permeate our government through the men who serve in it. But we find that today the doctrine of the separation of church and state has come to mean to some that Christianity is to be kept out of everything except the church.

Our schools, which were once founded on Christian principles, are more and more barring the

Bible. Our government, which also was founded in a large measure on Christian principles, is trying to make an unnatural separation between Christian thought and government.

Separation of church and state does not mean that CHRIST should have no place in the lives of our people in government and that His principles should not direct them in their decisions. When there was respect in all elements of our society for the Word of GOD and the belief was general that JESUS CHRIST was the eternal Son of GOD, there was a different atmosphere in the country. But that is all changing fast.

Satan is winning over, and the Bible is being kept out of our public life wherever possible.

Power to Convict and to Convert

We also see that this One who has the sword going out of His mouth has, through His Word and His Spirit, the power to convict and also to convert. This is why we are to preach the Word.

This same Word will also condemn a man. If you who read this do not have JESUS CHRIST as your personal Saviour, the Word of GOD will convict you of this neglect if you will read it; or - and this is something to consider - it will condemn you whether you read it or not.

The Word of GOD is described as a sword in Hebrews 4:12,13 where we read: "**For the word of God is quick**" (living and operative). It is different from any other word. I may read some great author like Shakespeare or some other secular writer, and I may enjoy what I read or I may reject what I read, but such reading is entirely different from that of the Word of GOD itself.

That Word meant something to my soul when I was a young Christian, a babe in CHRIST. Today that same Word is still living and working in me in a more profound way than ever before. It has the power to divide asunder soul and spirit.

The Word of GOD clearly distinguishes between the soulish life and the spiritual life. The soul has to do primarily with life in the flesh, whereas the spirit has to do with that which concerns GOD. When CHRIST comes into our hearts, He takes up His position in the spirit of man and from there He begins to control the soul and the body. All three of them are represented here in the Word of GOD. Nothing is hid from the searching of that Word. It passes judgment on the thoughts and the intents of the heart. No creature can hide from Him. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The Word of GOD penetrates the heart as nothing else will, that is why we must preach the Word.

Cults of the present day take a little part of the Word here and a little there, using only what they want and leave the rest. By this method they have built up many false systems and doctrines and have even brought division among believers as a result.

Satan's Throne

Another factor to consider here is that GOD not only knows where we dwell but He also knows where Satan's throne is. It would appear from this that there are certain locations or localities where Satan will establish himself, at least for a time. It is evident then, that Christians in such

places will be under greater stress and strain from Satanic attack than perhaps some others farther removed from Satan's main place of operation.

This leads us to this further thought: some of us are exposed to temptations to which others are not.

There are allurements of sin around some that are not around others. For this reason, if any of us are going to judge the character of another Christian brother, we should be sure we know where he lives in the Bible meaning of that term. In reality, since we may not know where any certain individual lives in respect to these things we have been dealing with, it is best for us not to judge his character too severely. GOD says, "I know the intents and purposes of your heart. I know your heart motives. I know under what circumstances you have to work."

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians, expressed this matter in very clear terms. He said, "**But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God**" (I Corinthians 4:3-5).

That fifth verse is very important in this matter of judging motives. Paul is saying in effect that the Corinthians did not know the motives back of his actions; therefore, it was not possible for them to form right conclusions with respect to his over-all service.

It is so easy to criticize harshly a fellow Christian when he falls. And we do this so readily even though we do not know what was in the person's heart, and know little about the circumstances leading up to the fall. It is much easier to live a godly life under some circumstances than it is under some others. It will take the omniscient CHRIST to determine the credit or blame due any of us.

We would need to know how much a person had to resist before we could rightly judge his character. We would also need to know how easy or difficult it might be for someone to run the race. Some persons, as we have said, do not have problems that others have. So in the light of these facts, let us be careful in our estimations of other people's lives. We may judge harshly in a case where our Saviour would not do so since He is all-knowing. We may, on the other hand, commend another person when in reality there is nothing that our Saviour would commend him for.

This does not mean that we are not to show discernment with regard to what people may do. The Saviour has given another principle, namely that by their fruits we shall know certain ones. It is one thing to recognize an action on the part of a Christian as being wrong, it is quite another for us to sit as judge, assuming the prerogative that belongs only to CHRIST. This does not mean we will condone sin and not condemn it, but it does mean we will be very restrained in our treatment of the offender, and use great caution in ascribing motives to him. The exhortation by Paul in Galatians 6 to restore one who falls is to those who are spiritual, and they are to be careful to take into account the fact that they themselves are prone to fall into the same kind of sin.

Circumstances under which we labor may all be on the surface, easy for all to see. On the other hand, they may be felt only in the inner recesses of a person's heart, and only GOD can know that. And let us not think that because someone can face the world and his fellow believers with a joyful testimony and let that joy be reflected in the happiness of his face that he is without trials. He has them, but has possibly learned how to rejoice in the Lord in spite of them.

We can thank GOD that at the Judgment Seat of CHRIST all these matters will be made plain. And some who have been highly lauded here on earth may not be so highly commended there. Some who are first here may be last there.

Satan has his throne, his base of operations, his headquarters at different places at different times. He is not omnipresent like GOD. Since he is an angelic being, however, Satan is able to move quickly from one locality to another, but he is not all-powerful and all-knowing. And so far as the Christian is concerned, he is to remember that Satan is a defeated foe. His power is beyond that of any of us as human beings, but it is not beyond that of any of us who walk in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. (See James 4:7.) Satan's kingdom is apparently well organized.

Daniel at one time had the answer to one of his prayers delayed because of the action of one of Satan's prince leaders. But eventually the message from GOD reached the prophet in spite of all that Satan and his cohorts could do.

Satan uses various strategies, depending on the circumstances he finds Christians in. At Smyrna he set up a "**synagogue**" opposing the work of the Lord through a religious system. At Pergamos he used persecution even unto death against believers. GOD knows all these things and all else beside, so we can confidently rest our faith in Him who is our faithful Creator and Redeemer. He knows as no one else does whether our service is in the power of the Spirit or in the flesh.

A Difference in Methods

GOD's method is to work through the spirit of man, whereas Satan approaches him from the standpoint of his soulish life. Satan starts from the outside and tries to work in, but GOD starts from the inside and works out.

The Word of GOD describes itself as being "**sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.**" A great many people have never learned this difference, but it is a vital one. We read in Philipians that the believer is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. The meaning of the passage, as far as I can understand it, is that GOD comes in and takes possession of the inner core of man's being, the spirit, and rules his life both soul and body from that source. We speak of the body having five senses, namely sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. And certainly there are properties in the soul such as conscience, emotion, mentality, will, and consciousness. These can all respond either to Satan or to GOD.

So skillful is the enemy that he can deceive us into thinking we are actually being blessed of GOD in our own hearts when in reality we are doing nothing more than responding on a purely human level to certain things that interest and please us.

For example let us say that we attend a musical concert. The music is delightful, and the words seem to contain a message for us. We listen and find ourselves lifted higher and higher in our emotional response. Then, after the concert is over we leave the place saying, "What a blessing I received from that music."

There may have been something there that might have caused us to think seriously on some aspect of life, but perhaps one of our companions made light of it and all of us together laughed it off. We went home, still appreciative of the music, but there was nothing in the experience that drove us to our knees. There was nothing in the concert that really brought us face to face with a decision that must be made for the Lord. Music, of course, may not be able in itself to bring us to such a place; but on the other hand, there are those who believe that because they have been emotionally stirred they have been brought closer to GOD through such means. Now that is a serious mistake. **Soulsh response is not the same as a spiritual response.**

Over against such an experience as has just been described we may have heard a sermon which drove home truth to our hearts so that when we went home we had to go to a private place and get alone with the Lord. Just what is the difference between the two? One has merely attached itself to our emotions and made us feel good. But the impression left on us did not go beyond our feelings; whereas the message with its spiritual power got down into the spiritual part of our being, and we settled things with GOD. This is the result of CHRIST having complete control of the spirit which in turn influences the soul and this influence is expressed in and through the body.

On the other hand, when we start with the body then go to the soul, we become self-centered. Our whole life is centered around our own interests. We ask ourselves, "What am I getting out of this? Am I going to be lifted up?" Our thoughts are always on self in a case like that.

Holding His Name

A number of commendations are given the church of Pergamos, the first of these is, "**thou holdest fast my name.**" The name in this case has to do with the person of JESUS CHRIST. An infidel may use the name of our Lord in a wrong way. Others may use the name of JESUS and talk of Him as a great teacher and a great example but still come short of holding fast His name.

He is the great GOD, the First and the Last, the One who created all things. The unscriptural teaching that JESUS CHRIST was the first created being is an old one and has taken on new vigor in the present day. The Bible does not teach that JESUS was the first created being, but that He Himself is eternal and is the Creator of all things.

There is a great mystery and also great miracles in connection with the coming of the Lord JESUS CHRIST into this world as the Babe of Bethlehem. The miracle of the virgin birth was accomplished through the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. And the fact that the eternal GOD came in the form of a human being is one of the outstanding tests used in connection with a teacher or a prophet, showing whether he is true or false. John wrote in his general Epistle: "**Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are 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" (I John 4:1-3).

Now we know from I Corinthians 12:3 that a person cannot say that JESUS is the eternal GOD except as that one is illuminated by the HOLY SPIRIT. Consequently, the man who believes and openly confesses with his mouth that JESUS CHRIST is the eternal GOD is a true teacher. It is not enough for a man to say, "I believe that JESUS is eternally GOD, but I don't speak about it."

The true man of GOD not only believes it, he confesses it. And according to this Scripture in I John it is not necessary for a man to openly deny that CHRIST is eternally GOD in order to be identified with the spirit of Antichrist. The very fact that he does not confess that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh marks him as belonging to the enemy. This other fact is also true: When a religious teacher denies the virgin birth of the Lord JESUS, we know that teacher is not of GOD, but of the spirit of Antichrist. From such we are to turn away.

We consider the X-ray machine to be a remarkable invention. But how much more remarkable is the power of GOD who can tell our thoughts even afar off, as the psalmist said. The Lord knows our works, and where we dwell, and what we are doing for His Name's sake, and what we are failing to do. There is nothing hid from GOD.

Holding to the Faith

Another commendation given to this church is that they had not denied "**my faith.**" This faith is not something that can be identified as "our faith" in the sense of our denominational creed. Men may speak of their different kinds of faiths, but there is only one true faith and that is described here by the Lord as "**my faith.**" This is the faith that we have in JESUS CHRIST; and according to Galatians 2:20 it is the "**faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.**"

In this connection there is a verse which has puzzled many of GOD's people. It is Colossians 1:23 where we read: "**If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.**"

The phrase, "**if ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled,**" is the root of the problem. Many Christians on reading this wonder how thin the thread is on which their salvation hangs. In order to find out the real meaning, we must see this phrase in its context, and this will help us with the expression "**my faith**" in the Book of the Revelation.

Beginning with Colossians 1:21 we have these words: "**And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled.**"

There are two distinct phases of salvation referred to here, yet the two are so closely knit together that they should not be separated in our thinking. They are not independent of each other, but this is where so many Christians make mistakes in connection with them.

The first subject is our reconciliation to GOD. Before we were saved, we were enemies, alienated from GOD, and dead in trespasses and sins. But through His death, CHRIST took away the penalty and guilt of our sin making it possible for us to be reconciled to GOD. This is confirmed in Romans 5:10 which reads: "**We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.**"

That is the first phase of salvation, and we received it by faith. We are saved by grace through faith.

The second phase has to do with our life as believers. We live by His life or as Galatians 2:20 says, we live "**by the faith of the Son of God.**" Our Saviour made the promise in the tenth chapter of John that He came not only to give us life, but that we might have it more abundantly. The giving of life has to do with our being reconciled to GOD. The second part has to do with this same life being expressed through us by the living CHRIST who lives in us. These, as we have pointed out, are two distinct phases of salvation, but the one follows the other. They are both part of the same life that GOD gives us when we trust in CHRIST. The purpose of the Lord JESUS, once we are reconciled, is to live through us and to present us holy, unblameable, and unproveable in His sight.

It is His constant aim in our lives to bring us to maturity. And we reach maturity by the same method of appropriating life as we did when we first believed. It is a walk of faith. But this is where so many make a grave mistake. Their thinking seems to be that they are saved initially by faith, but they are kept saved by works.

The Bible teaches us that we are saved by faith and we are kept by faith. But there is more than that in the teaching of the Scripture. We grow to maturity only as we daily appropriate the fact that CHRIST is living in us. If we will continue on in this faith we will mature to where we can be presented by our Saviour holy and unblameable. Otherwise, we will have to meet Him at the Judgment Seat of CHRIST where our works will be tested; and if they are merely our works, they will be wood, hay, and stubble and will burn. If they are His, produced by His faith in us, they will be gold, silver, precious stones and will remain.

It is no wonder, then, that we are told to continue in the faith. We are not to jump from faith for salvation to something else in order to reach perfection. "**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him**" is Paul's admonition in Colossians 2:6.

We must not allow anyone to unsettle us with the traditions of men or vain philosophies, for these will keep us from being built up in the things of CHRIST. We are not brought to maturity in the Christian life by keeping the Law of Moses, as some thought in the early church and as some teach us even now. The things enjoined upon us are not given in order that we might keep on being Christians; but now that we are Christians they become the expression of the living CHRIST in and through us. He will automatically produce in us the kind of life that pleases Him.

The reason some Christians live in a miserable life is that they have failed to continue believing GOD for their daily victory. That is why they lose their tempers and do other things contrary to the new life of CHRIST within them. This takes place within us when we do not trust GOD for our daily life. After having finished His atoning work in us, He then proceeds to perfect the new

life in us.

The Doctrine of Balaam

All that was said to Pergamos was not by way of commendation. Not all was right among them, and there are several counts against them.

In the first place there were those who held the doctrine of Balaam. The charge was not that all members of that church adhered to this doctrine but there were some in their midst who did. And the fact that some did was a clear indication that the others were not practicing church discipline. The church was loyal in the faith, but it was tolerating false views.

What is this doctrine of Balaam? We need to know, for it is a kind of teaching that Satan has used against the work of GOD on several occasions.

The historical background concerning this doctrine is found in Numbers chapters 22 through 25. There we learn that Balaam was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the people of Israel when they passed through the land of Moab on their way to Canaan. Balak was afraid of them and wanted them destroyed. He knew his armies were not strong enough to do the job, so he hired Balaam, a heathen diviner, who strangely enough also knew something of the true GOD, to bring down a curse upon Israel. Balaam tried to earn his ill-gotten wages, but found that instead of cursing Israel he blessed them. GOD would not allow this evil prophet to curse the nation GOD had blessed.

Balaam found that Israel, as a nation, was secure in GOD's hand. This security rested on GOD's sovereign will, grace and mercy, which was first revealed to Abraham in Genesis 12. The record is, **"I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee."** This was an unconditional promise GOD gave His servant. From one standpoint, then, Israel was immune to Satan's attacks. They were invulnerable to the enemy's stroke. The final purposes of GOD in that nation could not be permanently ruined.

But this is only one side of the matter. We must not stop here or we will not see the terribleness of the sin of the doctrine of Balaam. This is the divine record of what transpired when Balaam, instead of cursing Israel, blessed them saying, **"How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations"** (vv. 8,9). Again in the same chapter we read, **"Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them"** (vv. 18-21).

In this fashion GOD declared Israel's position as a nation before Him and the ultimate purpose He had for them. Balaam and Balak were the emissaries of Satan in this incident, and in dealing with such enemies GOD declares His ultimate purpose with regard to His people.

In chapter 24 Balaam reiterates the fact that he cannot curse Israel but must bless them and at the same time speak against Moab in so doing. The future glory of Israel's place in the kingdoms of the world is seen in verse 17: **"I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."**

This, as we have said, is one side of the question. This relates to GOD's eternal and sovereign purpose for Israel. He will eventually establish them in their land, and make them His own people, and put His love and commandments into their hearts. No enemy can curse them to where this sovereign purpose of God will be permanently thwarted. His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 will be literally fulfilled.

Over against this, we find that the nation of Israel suffered for its sins, and individuals in the nation suffered for their sins. The fourth chapter of Deuteronomy contains severe warnings relating to the committing of sin by the Israelites and chapter 28 gives a prophetic picture of their world-wide dispersion due to their national sins.

It is into this phase of Israel's life that the doctrine of Balaam is introduced. Balaam showed Balak how Israel could be temporarily stopped from achieving GOD's goal. Balak and his people were advised to fraternize with Israel, and to intermarry with them, thus making them ineffective for GOD's service.

This doctrine of Balaam led to many of the Israelites becoming idolaters and to thinking that because as a nation they were secure in GOD's sovereign plan, they could do as they pleased without any adverse effect upon them. This was a false security.

Balaamism's Results Today

Let us apply this lesson to ourselves today.

There are some professing Christians among us who talk about their security in CHRIST and declare that it makes no difference how they live. Their salvation is not a restraint on their sinning but becomes an excuse for it. They declare that if one's creed is correct, he need not be concerned about his conduct.

This has produced a conflict among believers due to the extreme teaching of some with reference to the sovereign grace of GOD and their lack of conscience toward sin.

With the true Christian there are two sides to this question just as we have seen in the case of Israel. GOD's side is given in John 10:28 where we read, **"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."** Some persons unthinkingly have said, "Well, but I can jump out of His hand." Such a statement, however, ignores the clear teaching of the passage. The promise is, **"They shall never perish"** and the verse continues, **"Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."**

Neither we ourselves nor anyone else can remove us from the hand of God once we are in it

through faith in CHRIST. Now, that is GOD's side. That states our position in CHRIST. This is something the enemy cannot destroy.

Another reassuring verse is John 6:37 where our Saviour promised: "**Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.**" No one can pluck us out, and the Saviour will not cast us out. That is one side of this whole subject.

Now look at the other side. In describing His sheep the Saviour said in John 10:27: "**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.**" This shows us that it is His sheep who receive eternal life, those who know Him, hear His voice, and follow Him. They follow Him because they are His. It is not a question of those who ought to be following or who may follow. His sheep are those who do follow Him.

A further elaboration on this is given in I John 3:9: "**Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**"

There are two very significant statements made here. "**Whosoever,**" we are told, "**is born of God does not commit sin,**" which means, "*does not practice sin.*" Then it goes on to say, "**for his seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin.**" CHRIST is the seed in us and He cannot sin. The consequence of this is that with CHRIST indwelling the believer the believer can no longer continue practicing sin in the way he did before he was saved.

We must remember that even in the apostolic church there were those who made a profession of faith in CHRIST who in reality had no possession of Him. Again we read in I John these words: "**They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us**" (I John 2:19).

We recognize fully that not all who fall into sin in the church are false professors. The doctrine of Balaam is being practiced in our midst as it was in Israel's early history and as was seen in apostolic days. There are those who use the grace of God as a license to sin. Israel has been suffering for nearly four millenniums for that teaching she embraced as taught by Balaam. Likewise, there are Christians today who have become friends of the world and for that reason have come under GOD's disciplinary judgments. James said, "**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**" (James 4:4). When the true Christian steps aside from the path of righteousness, he has to answer to GOD for his disobedience.

Without a doubt, there are persons in our midst today who have been attracted by the doctrine of the security of the believer but have no real faith in their own hearts concerning CHRIST, and use their fancied security as a license to sin.

Remember that in writing to the church at Pergamos, the Lord said that they must repent and do their good works quickly or He would come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. GOD will not tolerate sin in any of His children.

On the other hand some of GOD's own people may have rejected the truth of the believer's security in CHRIST because of the loose living on the part of some who hold that doctrine. None of us should allow ourselves to be robbed of the assurance of salvation in CHRIST. Let us stick to the Word of God and live according to it.

The doctrine of Balaam as it applies to our churches today leads Christians into the sin of spiritual fornication where they become friendly with the world and cease to live for CHRIST. Worldliness, we must remember, is an attitude of heart. It places great value on temporary things and neglects eternal things. Some have tried to pinpoint worldliness as wearing certain types of clothing or driving certain types of cars or many other things of the same nature. Worldliness has to do basically with wrong motives and attitudes. When our motives and attitudes are right, the outward expression of the life will be right.

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes

The second matter the Lord found wrong with the church at Pergamos is expressed in these words: "**So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate**" (Revelation 2:15). There is little help from the commentaries in regard to what the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes actually was. The best answer to the problem is found in the Word itself. The word Nicolaitanes is actually two Greek words combined, the first being "nikao" meaning "to conquer"; the second is "laos" meaning people or "laity." From the prophetic and historical angle this church represents the age which saw the beginning of the rise of the priesthood and the authority of such men over the souls of others.

It is nothing new for men to lust after religious power, but it is always sad when they do, and the consequences are always evil. Such overlook the Lord's admonition when He said, "**Whosoever will be great among you... shall be servant of all**"

GOD says He hates this doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. When the organized church reached the place where the clergy were put on a high pedestal and given absolute control over the laity GOD was grieved and angered. The evil consequences of this system have been to place in the hands of men the prerogatives that belong only to CHRIST. He it was who came and provided salvation for us, given on the basis of faith in Him. It is not dispensed by men at their will but applied to human hearts through faith by the HOLY SPIRIT.

GOD gave gifted men to the church according to Ephesians 4:11, 12: "**And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.**" His purpose in so doing is expressed in the next words: "**For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.**"

These men were given to the church to build it up, to teach the saints, to train them, and to unite them in the work of the ministry.

But what has happened down through the years is that the work of the ministry has come to mean the work of the ministers. A few men known as the "clergy" and often called "ministers" are given the responsibility which actually belongs to all the Body of CHRIST. GOD did not put this matter to a vote and ask His people what their desire was with regard to it. Here is what He

says to those who have been reconciled to Him and which includes all of us who have trusted in Christ: "**And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation**" (II Corinthians 5:18). This is a task for the entire body of CHRIST, not for a chosen few.

GOD does not do away with human organizations. Such are endorsed in His Word. And it is also true, that there are some whom He has called to spend all their time in His work. One may be a teacher, another an evangelist, and another a preacher and pastor. But the reason for such leaders is not that they might dominate and control the other believers, but that they might train these believers for the work of the ministry. That is part of the function of this Broadcast which GOD has raised up in these days. It is not only our responsibility to seek to win others for CHRIST but also to teach Christians in such a way that they, too, can help spread the gospel of our Lord.

A Twofold Sin

The modern sin of Nicolaitanism is twofold as I see it. There are those who lord it over GOD's heritage. There are others again who shelve their responsibility that is theirs as believers in CHRIST and say that they hire the clergy to do that work for them.

How far this all is from the program of GOD!

You recall that our Saviour said, "**Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8). In this He gave His followers both a local and a world-wide program.

The tendency is, as it always has been, for people to confine the witnessing to a small sector or to their own group. So it was with the early church. When we reach the eighth chapter of Acts we find the work of GOD confined largely to Jerusalem and Judaea. A little had penetrated into Samaria, but the uttermost part of the earth was far from hearing the gospel. It had been totally neglected up to this point.

GOD permitted persecution to fall upon the Church, and its members "**were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.**"

The "clergy," if we may use that term in connection with the apostles, stayed in Jerusalem while the "laity" spread the gospel out from Judaea and Samaria and into other parts. This is the program that has been followed on many occasions. GOD has had to permit persecution to come upon His people before they were willing to go abroad with the message of life.

After a while in the early church, the clergy not only had authority to run the church organization, but soon they became the only interpreters of Scriptures. There came a day when they even took the Bible away from the common people, saying that they could not understand it. Only the priesthood could interpret the Scriptures. And finally that became limited to a few leaders in the organized church. Such then, was the sin of the Nicolaitanes, and its evil fruit.

GOD's warning to Pergamos was, "**Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth**" (Revelation 2:16). The word "**repent**" means to turn about, to turn away from something, and it involves a change of attitude, a change of heart, and a change of mind.

The "**coming**" of the Lord in this warning is not the second coming, as we have noted before; it has to do with disciplinary judgment on those of GOD's children who disobey Him at any particular time.

For some reason or another, the Word of GOD is not entering into hearts today with the piercing quality that it should be. There is too much indifference even among the people of GOD. It is not the wish of the Father to have to discipline in the sense spoken of in this verse. He would rather that we would obey and gladly fulfill our responsibilities. So we learn from the Scriptures that if we would hear His voice, we should not harden our hearts but come to Him.

Pergamos was blamed for tolerating the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Are we in anywise guilty of tolerating similar things in our lives and hearts today? Then we can in no wise expect to escape His personal judgment as stated here to this church.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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