

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

Message 10

Words: 6195

Scripture: Revelation 2:12-17

INTRO: We are considering the subject mentioned by Jesus in His criticism of the Church at Perrgamos. They were tolerating two troublesome doctrines and we were looking at the doctrine of Balaam and considered the history of this doctrine. This is in my estimation a very important doctrine for us to understand because it has been a problem ever since the age represented by Perrgamos was entered. I gave you a second assignment on this doctrine and it was to try to settle in your minds what you think this doctrine is and whether we are affected by it today.

We saw that just before Israel entered the land of Canaan, they needed to pass through Moab, and Balak, king of Moab wanted Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam was not able to curse them but personally counseled Balak how to defeat Israel. He said you can't do it by war, let me tell you how to do it, and that is our subject now: just what is the doctrine of Balaam?

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. As we begin I want to mention something very important. When God inspired the Bible, when He had various accounts written down, they were written down for a purpose. I do not understand all those purposes. But some are more obvious. We begin in verse 14. Paul writes:

*14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul is writing to the Corinthians who are always in one kind of error or another. And here he tells us why these OT accounts are given be God. We'll read verses 6-11:

*6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*

*7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."*

8 *Nor let us commit sexual immorality (pornia, as in Revelation 2), as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;*

9 *nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;*

10 *nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*

11 *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*

So we go back to our passage in Revelation 2:14-15.

#### 4) The criticism (2:14-15) cont'd

We are looking at the Lord's criticism of the church at Pergamos. He says in verse 14: *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.*

The question before us now is, what is the doctrine of Balaam? Well, the doctrine of Balaam is what he taught Balak to do. Straus says G. Campbell Morgan said, "The doctrine of Balaam broadly stated was undoubtedly that, seeing that they were the covenant people of God, they might with safety indulge themselves in social intercourse with their neighbors" (54). You can have both God and the world. Straus views this as the same thing as uniting the Church and the world. He says, "When and how did the church and the world fall in love?" He explains how you can know if you are a Christian. He said that when the Christian lives like a Christian, the world hates him. LaHaye calls Pergamos the indulged church. He says that Satan learned from the church at Smyrna that persecution does not work. So it seems that Balaam taught Balak that you can't win over God's people by killing them or cursing them. You

will only make them grow further. No, you must destroy them from within. Wim Malgo says, "I have to repeat this: when Satan is not successful in bringing a child of God to fall outwardly, he puts everything into motion to bring him to fall inwardly" (I:93). William Barclay says to all this, "The principal of the Christian life is not escape, but conquest" (pg. 112).

Barclay says the teachers of the doctrine of Balaam sought to persuade the Christian like this: "...that there was nothing wrong with a prudent conformity to the world's standards, and that they urged the Church to use a cautious policy of compromise with the practices and the morals of the world" (pg. 114).

John F. Walvoord says, "The doctrine of Balaam therefore was the teaching that the people of God should intermarry with and compromise in the matter of idolatrous worship." (makes the most sense if this city's name is marriage, gamos.) He says that intermarriage with the heathen was a real problem. One can understand what intermarriage would do to a church in a culture like this. He says it appears that some in this church held that Christians had liberty in this matter.

John McArthur agrees and he says it worked. And he said the problem was the church did nothing about it. Further, Balaam's way was being a prophet for money. J.B. Smith says he was a hireling. And Balaam's error was thinking that if Israel would intermarry with the Moabite women, God would curse them, which was what Balak wanted.

He says, "Undoubtedly intermarriage with the heathen and spiritual compromise were real issues in Pergamos where civic life and religious life were so entwined. It would have been difficult for Christians in this city to have any kind of social contact with the outside world without becoming involved with the worship of idols or in the matter of intermarriage with non-believers" (68).

This is the doctrine of Balaam in my view. It goes something like this in my interpretation: "You cannot defeat Israel by cursing them. God won't allow that. But let me tell you how you can get them cursed. You can do it by corrupting them morally. And the most powerful thing to defeat their men is to corrupt them through your women, and then have them lead the Jewish people to your gods. If you do this, they will be cursed."

Basically, the doctrine of Balaam is to defeat by compromise, which leads to corruption. The doctrine of Balaam is pictured in the life of Balaam himself. He spoke in the name of the LORD, which is the sacred name, Jehovah, the only true God. But he used enchantments and communicated with the devil too. And there you have the doctrine of Balaam. His doctrine was this: "You don't have to be so narrow as to say there is only one way. You can have God and the world too." And that is what Balaam did in his own life. He had Jehovah God and practiced sorcery.

You see, Balaam would not go against the instructions of the Lord and say something different than the Lord had said, but he then went and counseled Balak, and gave him demonic counsel. He had the best of both worlds. And if Balak would give Israel the best of both worlds, if he could combine Judaism with his gods, he would defeat Israel and they could marry and live happily ever after. If you have the best of both worlds, you have the high life. This is 'the life' in the eyes of Balaam.

But how did Pergamos have the doctrine of Balaam inside the church. Walvoord says, "The doctrine of Balaam therefore was the teaching that the people of God should intermarry with the heathen and compromise in the matter of idolatrous worship. This is the contrast to the 'way of Balaam,' that is, selling his prophetic gift for money (2 Pet. 2:15), and 'the error of Balaam', his assumption that God would curse Israel (Jude 11)."

In light of that, look at verse 14 again. It says:

*14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*

The NKJV translates the word *pornea* here as sexual immorality, an inaccurate and misleading translation in my view. But we might ask, if the Lord's people were intermarrying with the Moabites, why would that be called *pornea*, if *pornea* is the sin of the unmarried? First, it could be because the Jews considered a marriage to one outside of their faith as an illegitimate marriage. If that were the case, this would be viewed as fornication.

When Ezra and a good number of Jews returned from Babylon to their own land he found that some of them had married women of other gods in Babylon and he had them put all those women away. Why? It would have been viewed as fornication, both physically and spiritually. The second reason the word *pornea* may have been used here is that idolatry, which these were led into is considered spiritual fornication.

#### NICOLAITANS

Well, we go on to another error in the church at Pergamos. We'll read verses 14-15 again:

*14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put 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.*

Now the Lord says He hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. He commended the Ephesian church for hating this doctrine. In Smyrna this doctrine is not mentioned. They would not put up with it. But we are now in a church that tolerates false doctrine.

So, let us consider now first the meanings of several names here. This will lead us into the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. The name *Balak* means a *Devastator*. *Balaam* means *to devour people*. Our text in Revelation brings together Balaam and the Nicolaitans. There is a close connection between the name *Balaam* and *Nicolaitans*. The first part of the name Balaam is usually viewed as coming from *bala*, or to swallow or devour. I do not know much Hebrew but the word *am* is very simple. It means *people*. So Bala plus am is Bala'am, so it means to swallow the people. That would then mean a people devourer, or one who overcomes the people. The name *Nicolaitans* comes from *nikao*, meaning to conquer and *laos*, meaning people. So both words mean basically the same thing.

In a sense I see here a forerunner of the end times where antichrist will have the false prophet to help him conquer the people. I see Balak, the Devastator as a picture of the antichrist; and Balaam as picturing the False Prophet. And together, they conquer the people.

Furhtermore, the name Perrgamos has two words, one meaning high or exalted and marriage. Idolatry was practiced on high places. The high, the exalted way is to intermarry Judaism with false gods, or Christianity with the world. And when the Church goes to the high places, it will end up in intermarriage, or intermarriage will end a Christian up in a high place, a place of idolatry. In Perrgamos the bride of Christ uniting with the world. There is much talk about unity in the church, but it almost always wants to end up with unity with sin. Compromise is often the price. And when it is not, separation has to occur somewhere.

So let us consider the Nicolaitans a little closer. The Lord says, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans..." Now, you see, the Nicolaitans were in Ephesus as well. But the Lord says to the church there, "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Rev. 2:6). But in Perrgamos, not only were the Nicolaitans there, they were in the church. And not only were they in the church, but like Balaam's doctrine, they had the Nicolaitans in the church! They tolerated them! Not only did they tolerate them and their deeds, but their teaching too!

There is not agreement about who the Nicolaitans are. Let me read what I gave you when we came to them in the church of Ephesus:

Walvoord presents two views: First is the view that these are the people conquerors. This view comes from the word Nicolaitans which comes from *nikao* = to conquer + *laos* = people; thus to conquer the people. J.B. Smith says, "They were leaders in the church who posed as lords over God's heritage. Doubtless here are the beginnings of priestcraft, a system that later developed into the Roman hierarchy" (64).

The second view is that this was a sect started by Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch and one of the seven deacons. A helpful internet site is "Gotquestions.org." Here is what they write: 'The exact origin of the Nicolaitans is unclear. Some Bible commentators believe they were a heretical sect who followed the teachings of Nicolas—whose name means "one who conquers the people"—who was possibly one of the deacons of the early church mentioned in Acts 6:5. It is possible that Nicolas became an apostate, denying the true faith and became part of a group holding 'the doctrine of Balaam,' who taught Israel 'to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.' Clement of Alexandria says, 'They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.' Their teaching

perverted grace and replaced liberty with license”  
end quote.

It is said by some that there is nothing that links the Nicolaitans to the deacon Nicolas, the deacon of Acts 6. I don't think that is not quite true. Irenaeus, one of the early church pastors, who was born in 130 ad in Smyrna, wrote of the Nicolaitans as those who followed Nicolas, one of the deacons chosen in Acts 6. Hippolytus born in 170 ad follows Irenaeus' teaching and other early church pastors as well. So it is not correct to say there is no evidence for this teaching. Then there was Clement of Alexandria, born in 150 ad, born in 155 ad. All of these said the same thing.

Then some think because the names, Balaam and Nicolus mean basically the same thing; Nicolaitanism is basically the same teaching as that of Balaam. I do not think that is correct. I think we clearly have two different doctrines here, though the end result may be the same. I think they are two different doctrines because in Ephesus the Nicolaitans are mentioned, but not Balaam. Furthermore, Revelation 2:15 says, "Thus you also have..." They had Balaamism and they also had Nicolaitanism. I can see no way how the two represent the same thing. But McArthur notes that they lead to the same thing.

I am inclined to believe that the Nicolaitans were those who, like Gnosticism, turned the grace of God into license for liberal living. John F. Walvoord says, "Nicolaitanism seems to represent moral departure." I personally think the deeds and teaching of the Nicolaitans is a reference to licentious living. First, it is quite early in Church history to have a problem with clerical hierarchy. And second, there were other teachings like that of the Gnostics who abused the doctrine of grace and introduced licentiousness in its place (2 Peter 2:15, 19; Jude 1:4).

Let me give you a little story as told by John McArthur. He says:



Then there's another thing He has against them. Verse 15, "Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." That little phrase "in the same way" is important because the teaching of the Nicolaitans led to the same behavior. Nicolaitans were comparable to those who were following Balaamism. Some think this goes back to Nicholas who once in Acts 6 was appointed as a deacon but later defected and became an apostate, we can't verify that. But apparently this man, whoever he was, Nicholas, like Balaam had advocated a mingled life style. He may have been kind of a pre-Gnostic, someone who believed he had entered in to ascended knowledge. He no doubt was a Libertine who believed that you could conduct yourself any way you wanted it. It advocated an extreme indulgence in sin, uncleanness, immorality and orgies based upon a perverted understanding of God's grace. It was an abuse of freedom.

You have people like that today who think they're free in Christ to behave themselves any way they want. I'll never forget having an experience with a well-known and popular preacher and writer whose wife came to me and said, "Could you help me? I have a burden for my husband, he needs help desperately."

And I said, "What's the problem?"

She said, "It's his life style. Women in every city, this has been going on for years, bar rooms, drinking, wasting money, involved in all kinds of sin."

I said, "Well I'll be happy to meet him and confront him." So I called and set up an appointment for a meeting place. I walked in a restaurant where I was to meet him and he was sitting with two unseemly women at a bar, drinking. And I walked up to him and said, "I'm here to speak with you," and pulled him away and said, "This is the first and last time I'll ever meet you in a place like this."

We went on to discuss the life style, the patterns of the life style.

*And he defended himself on the basis of grace and Christian freedom...went on to divorce his wife and marry for a third time, end quote.*

Well, in our day Balaamism and Nicolaitanism is ever deepening and becoming ever more subtle, doctrinally speaking. Lighthouse Trails has an article (Sept. 12, 2017) that mentions Leonard Sweet. They said he asks a question that 'effectively sums up the new way of thinking:' See if you can follow this new way of thinking:

"What if we were to think connectness rather than correctness?" Then they say, "In today's emerging paradigm/faith, 'relationship, not believing is central,' so connectness is naturally replacing correctness. The two go hand in hand. Since the correctness of the truth of God's Word is a "stumbling block in the way" of today's desired connectness, these connections are thus held together not by correct truth but by man's "reimagined" "truth." But, naturally, the latter is not seen as incorrect in today's preferred "light" of darkness.

They give this quote from Leonard Sweet, "The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus, who taught that love is what makes life a success... Only love. The main theme in the preaching of Jesus was that life with the Father was all about love ... that we do not worship a God who punishes us for evil and rewards us for good... "Propositionalists want you to fall in line. Relationalists want you to fall in love. Christians aren't people who follow Christianity. Christians are people who follow and fall in love with Christ....

"We were put here to 'glorify God and enjoy him forever.' In other words, we were not put here to 'do the right thing' but to be in a 'right relationship' with God. We were not put here to 'keep commandments' but to conceive beauty, truth, and goodness. We were not put here to 'take a stand' but to walk in the light for the greater

glory of God. Biblical truth doesn't feast on fact. It feasts on relationship and revelation, which is why eternal truth is better communicated by the fictions of parables and narratives than the facts of science and philosophy (Leonard Sweet; 2nd ellipsis dots in the original)."

Well, has Balaam entered the church? Without question he has. The marriage of the Church to the world, Balaamism; made way for the doctrine of licentious living, Nicolaitanism. If Balaam taught intermarriage with idol worshippers, and Perr gamos, means marriage; could it be that divorce and remarriage is also Balaamism? And does divorce and remarriage then make way for Nicolaitanism, licentious living?

I have no question that God hates the modern teaching that repentance is a work. It makes me shudder to think how God must feel about this when He paid the price of His only Son and we call repentance a work. But what does He think of the unconditional teachings of love, grace, forgiveness and salvation. It seems to me we have there all the ingredients needed to bring about Nicolaitanism. And both Balaamism and Nicolaitanism come together in this: You can have Christ and divorce and remarriage, or licentiousness. Don't let such things bother you, you are still a Christian. No matter how you live, repentance is not necessary. Once you were saved; once a son always a son.

5) The counsel 2:16-17a

We move now to the counsel in verses 16-17. Here is what the Lord counseled this church:

*2:16-17a 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 to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Here is the first word: "Repent!" Now today we allow all kinds of behavior under the guise of love. We are just a loving people. We don't remove certain practices, we allow them under the big umbrella of love.

And the Lord says, "Repent, or else I will come and fight against them with the sword of my mouth." McArthur notes that when Balaam failed to see the Lord in his path but the donkey did, that the Lord pulled a sword. From our passage we learn that the Lord has the right of the sword.

Now, in grammar, in verbs there are first, second and third person. The speaker, the Lord Jesus in this case is first person. The one spoken to is the angel of the church. That is second person. But the Lord is speaking to the church about someone else, and that is third person. When the Lord said, "Repent", that is second person. When He said, "...or else I will come and fight against them..." that is third person. Those who hold the doctrine of Balaam and Nicolas are not told to repent. It is the church that is to repent. And what for? For permitting, for tolerating those who carried these false teachings! And so, if the church does not get rid of those who hold this false doctrine, the Lord says, "I will!" And the Lord says if you don't deal with it, I will come quickly. The Lord is not tolerant in the case of false doctrine.

And then, once more He speaks to every individual believer in the church. You see, we all have a responsibility. So the Lord says, "He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

#### 6) The Comfort (2:17b)

We come now to the comfort the Lord expresses to this church. We are in 2:17b:

*2:17b To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.*

First, once more the promise is made to the overcomer. This is the one who gets the victory

over sin. What happens to the believer who does not overcome? Well, they don't receive the promise. And the first promise is that He will give them some of the hidden manna to eat. And we ask, "Just what is this hidden manna?"

I found William Barclay most helpful here. Turn to Exodus 16. He presents three possibilities. First, God, in the OT, fed Israel with manna. It was a heavenly food, a special food. Every morning they gathered enough for the day. They did this for six days, but on Friday they gathered enough for two days, enough for the Sabbath as well.

And when they later built the ark of the covenant, they placed some of this manna inside the ark. So look now at verses 33-34:

*33 And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations."*

*34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.*

So it is hidden. Now surely God put some of this manna in the ark for a purpose. The Jewish people had a tradition about this, and to some day be able to enjoy this hidden manna meant to enjoy the blessings of the millennial kingdom.

Second view, so turn to Psalm 78:25. It says this in verses 23-25:

*23 Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,*

*24 And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.*

*25 Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.*

So the manna that came from heaven is here called angel's food. Barclay says something like this: In

Perrgamos you are not allowed to eat the food offered to idols, but in heaven you will be allowed to eat the food of the angels of God. The food they were not allowed to eat in Perrgamos was demonic food and they were not allowed to eat it, but in heaven they would be allowed to eat the food of angels.

The third view he presents is that in the Gospel of John he tells us that Jesus told the Jews that their fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they were dead (John 6:49). Then in verses 57-58 Jesus said:

*57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.*

*58 "This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

So Barclay says, "If the hidden manna and the bread of life are the same, then the hidden manna is not only the bread of the Sacrament; it stands for nothing less than Christ, who is the bread of life, and this is a promise that Christ will give him who is faithful nothing less than Himself" (118).

Let me present one more possibility. One day when Jesus was traveling north to the Galilee area, He stayed by the well at Sychar while the disciples went to buy lunch. Well, He spoke to the woman who came to draw water. And when the disciples came back they invited Him to eat but He said, I have food to eat that you do not know of. Could this be a reference to the food that believers will enjoy once they get to heaven? Well, I leave it to you to ponder.

We come to one more difficult to understand promise. Jesus said, *And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which*

*no one knows except him who receives it.* To the overcomer of sin, the Lord makes this promise now.

The answer as to what is meant by the various illustrations and promises used regarding each of these seven churches must be sought in the history of each place written to. The Lord used things that they could understand. Various things have been proposed regarding the white stone, but it seems the history for the white stone has not yet been discovered.

Some have sought to connect it with the tessera stone. Sir William Ramsey says, "Some scholars quote the analogy of the tessera given to proved and successful gladiators inscribed with the letters SP, which they regard as a new title spectatus, i.e., tried and proved; but this analogy, though tempting in some ways, will not bear closer examination. The letters SP on the gladiatorial tesserae are considered by Mommsen to stand, not for spectatus, but for spectavit. Various theories are proposed about the meaning; but no theory makes out that a new name was given to the proved gladiator with the tessera: he was simply allowed to retire into private life after a proved and successful career, instead of being compelled to risk his reputation and life when his powers were failing. The analogy fails in the most essential points." (Ramsay, W. M.. The Letters to the Seven Churches (Kindle Locations 4638-4645). Albion Press. Kindle Edition.)

#### B. TYPICALLY

What church does Perrgamos typify? Well, without doubt it is the compromising church. What is the warning to us? Do not compromise. Do not allow false doctrine into the church. Always be watchful to marry some aspect of the world in order to have the best of both worlds.

The Lord knows where each one of us is and what testings we face. We must know God's Word and detect and deal with false teaching. We must not tolerate

false teaching in our churches. Overcomers will be rewarded.

### C. PROPHETICALLY

In my studies there was hardly a writer that did not connect the prophetic significance to a very important event that took place just over 300 years after the time of Christ. We have spoken of the 10 days mentioned to the church at Smyrna as possibly referring to the ten Roman rulers who persecuted the Church.

The eleventh Roman ruler was Constantine. I suspect that largely through the influence of his mother. His mother's name was Helena. She was of humble birth and married a Roman army officer who was rising in the ranks and later became Emperor Constantius Chlorus. Constantine was born to this couple. Later he Constantius divorced her and married a more prominent woman, more fitting to his position. When Constantine's father was killed in war, the troops made Constantine the ruler of Rome. Helena converted to Christianity later in her life and when Constantine became ruler she was given the imperial title Augusta. Using her new position she now built churches all over the empire for the worship of God.

Dr. Harold Willmington describes Constantine's conversion like this:

*Time: 315-590 - (Willmington 414-415) "One of the key individuals during this period was a soldier named Constantine. He was made Emperor in 306 by his dying father and the Roman troops. Upon coming to power in the East, he was immediately faced with destruction by the Western Emperor named Macentius. Constantine realized his uneasy troops must be strengthened, and thus claimed to have seen in a dream the image of the cross and to have heard a voice saying, 'By this sign conquer!'"*

One article I read said this:



*In the spring of 311, with 40,000 soldiers behind him, Constantine rode toward Rome to confront an enemy whose numbers were four times his own. Maxentius, vying for supremacy in the West, waited in Rome with his Italian troops and the elite Praetorian Guard, confident no one could successfully invade the city. But Constantine's army was already overwhelming his foes in Italy as he marched toward the capital.*

*Maxentius turned to pagan oracles, finding a prophecy that the "enemy of the Romans" would perish. But Constantine was still miles away. So, bolstered by the prophecy, Maxentius left the city to meet his foe.*

*Meanwhile, Constantine saw a vision in the afternoon sky: a bright cross with the words *By this sign conquer*. As the story goes, Christ himself told Constantine in a dream to take the cross into battle as his standard.*

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/rulers/constantine.html>

*Willmington continues like this: Thus inspired, he led his men to victory, defeating his enemy at the famous battle of Milvian Bridge, just outside Rome. In 313 he signed the Edict of Toleration, which granted freedom to Christians. It now became fashionable to join the church. He promised gold pieces and white robes to all converts. Soon pagans had joined the church by the thousands, taking with them their heathen practices. The church then became so worldly and the world so churchy that no difference could be seen! Loraine Boettner lists the following unscriptural doctrines which were introduced during this general time period:*

- making prayers for the dead (300)*
- making the sign of the cross (300)*
- the worship of saints and angels (375)*
- institution of the mass (394)*
- worship of Mary (431)*
- priests began dressing differently from lay people (500)*
- doctrine of extreme unction (526)*
- doctrine of purgatory (593)*

-worship services conducted in Latin (600)

-prayers directed to Mary (600)

-priests not allowed to marry (1100)

Here is how one Internet article put Constantine's conversion. It says:

J.B. Smith says this of early church history, "When the persecuting forces of the world sought to destroy the church, she flourished all the more both numerically and spiritually. In the church at Perrgamos, persecution is barely mentioned. She seems to court the friendship of the world, for she condones evil workers..." (71).

Let me just mention that Sir William Ramsey thinks there was a lot of persecution in Perrgamos and many were killed there. But if this is so, the Lord has chosen to leave that out. When Constantine turned favorable to Christianity through his great victory in battle, the world and the church married; church and state married.

#### D. PERSONALLY

Wim Malgo's commentary on Revelation makes a good point. You see, it is one thing to suffer and die for the Lord. It is another to suffer and not die. He says, "Maybe your type of martyrdom exists in your marriage, in your family, or in your place of work, and you must live and work together with those in whose heart is located the 'throne of Satan'. Now it counts that you have this 'Antipas-spirit' of testimony which does not deny the faith or the life of Jesu in practice. There are so many in the Church of Jesus today who despair and resign, who simply give up the good fight of faith. Such have become fearful and unbelieving. But what does Scripture say? 'The fearful and the unbelieving and the abominable' (Revelation 21:8) will not enter glory. There are those who follow the request of the flesh in whatever form; they give into the sin of the flesh" (88).

Why does God allow such suffering, and sometimes even martyrdom? If we give in we know one thing, we are not fit for the kingdom of God. If I have given

in, it is time to repent and live right regardless of the cost. It is possible to live right even if one is put inside a brass bull and cooked to death. What excuse do we have in our free world?

CONCL: And in conclusion, the One who wrote to this church is the one who has the sharp two edged sword. He has the right of the sword. We learn that it is possible to be in a church where the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans is tolerated. We are in an age given to tolerance, tolerance of sin. We see it on every hand in our community and country.

The Lord says, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." Scripture warns us to make our calling and election sure. I have but very little doubt that many churches in our country have only a few truly saved people in their church, and they have no idea that this is the case. There is one solution for anyone in any church who is under demonic impressions of doctrine that sounds good, and that is to listen to the Lord and hear it and then to repent. The doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans is alive and on the move today.