***The Error of Balaam, No. 2  
  
RV14-02***

We are looking in Revelation 2 at the letter to the city of Pergamum, a community of Christians who were under the displeasure of the Lord Jesus Christ because they were compromising their separation from pagan beliefs and pagan practices. The pagan world had many favors to bestow on these Christians, and it was very tempting to want these favors. The pressure that had been on these Christians from Satan's world system had caused some of them to seek relief by simply cooperating with the evil. Satan's plan is always to get Christians entangled with the world's evil so that God will have to discipline them instead of using them in His service. Believers who are out of fellowship with their heavenly father are, of course, no threat to Satan in his battle against God.

**Balaam**

The problem of the Pergamum church was a repeat of the doctrine of Balaam in the Old Testament Scriptures. Balaam, as you will recall, was asked by the Moabite King Balak to curse the Jewish people as they stood on the border of entrance into the Promised Land. This was the new generation that had arisen. All of the old slave-type mentalities had died off during the almost 40 years of wandering out in the wilderness. These were the young people who were 19 years old when they left Egypt, or who had been born out there in the wilderness. This was a generation who knew nothing but freedom. They'd never been slaves, and they had been forged under the direction of Joshua into a tremendous military force. It was no wonder that the pagans, when they saw them camped there on their border, had considerable trepidation and fear. This force had already knocked out several major nations in the Canaanite area, and the word had very rapidly spread as to what this Israelite army was capable of doing in the field.

So Balak wanted to bring divine curse upon them. He called upon Balaam to do this because he feared the Jews. We find in the book of 2 Peter an observation about this man Balaam that I think is significant. 2 Peter 2:15-16: "Who have forsaken the right way and are gone astray." This is speaking about false teachers or false prophets. "They've gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with the man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet." Peter very definitely calls Balaam a prophet of God. So indeed he was, which would indicate to us that we must view this man as a believer, but a believer who has fallen into reversionism.

In Numbers 22:18, where we have the history of Balaam recorded for us, we have Balaam addressing God in such a way, again, as to indicate that he was a believer. Numbers 22:18: "And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, 'If Balak would give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God (Jehovah, my Elohim) to do less or more." So Balaam looked upon God and called him Jehovah his Elohim (the Lord his God). And the conduct of Balaam is the conduct, then, of a believer. But you will notice a very significant point made about this man in 2 Peter 2:16, where it speaks about the madness of the prophet. What we have here was a man who was spiritually insane. Anybody who falls into reversionism (into backsliding in spiritual maturity) does that, because he's gone spiritually berserk. It can continue to the point where a person is completely disoriented in spiritual things so that he is monumentally insane. What we have here is a prophet of God who, because of his negative volition and his covetousness for material things, has gone spiritually insane. This reversionist is so disoriented that he is willing to oppose the wrong objects. He is willing actually here to oppose God. God steps in and doesn't permit him to do it, but as far as Balaam is concerned, he's ready to do it. He's ready to oppose the people of God.

That's usually what happens with a reversionist. His spiritual insanity causes him to lose his sense of proper loyalty, and he begins to oppose the very people he ought to support, and he supports the very people he shouldn't support. This is also characteristic of those who are spiritually immature. Spiritually immature people do not know how to make selections of loyalty, so they will make the kind of selections that people do in the political realm. How are politicians elected to office? On issues? On things they stand for? Not at all. Every time we get to a political campaign, what's the key word you keep hearing again and again and again when looking for a candidate? Charisma. They always want somebody that's got charisma. The whole system of getting elected to political office is to have a mouthful-of-teeth smile and a lot of so-called magnetism, and that's all you need. Well, you need one more thing. You have to be able to convey the idea that you're not in favor of the things you stand for, and you're not opposed to the things that you're against. That way you will have no trouble with anyone, and you will be elected to office, provided you're a handsome and a very attractive personality.

The immature Christian is moved by emotions. He's attracted on secondary and wrong bases. He'll have the most fanatical devotion to some church that's robbing him, for example, of all his eternal reward. You might say, "What's the matter with this fella?" He's spiritually insane. That's what's wrong with him. He doesn't even know what's happening to him. Just as some people are going to open their eyes and get the shock of their life when they go over to the other side, and discover they're headed for hell, and they came out of a fine, wonderful church where they were singing the Lord's praises, but they were depending on water baptism to get them into heaven. So many Christians are going to find the shock of their lives when they get over to the other side and discover how poor they are. Then they're going to remember all those verses in the Bible that talked about rewards in heaven that they never paid any attention to. But there's going to be no reversing in either case.

Balaam had a devotion to money and to a pagan king, and he had opposition to the people of God. Now that's getting everything backwards. This false prophet of God was motivated by covetousness, and Balak offered to make him very, very rich. He would make it well worth his while if he would curse the people of God. But Balaam recognized the authority of God over him, and he recognized his inability to override God's protection of Israel. Again and again, he told Balak, "I can't say anything that God won't let me say. I can't do anything that God won't let me do. If you give me your houseful of silver and gold: I don't care how wealthy you make me, if God won't let me do it, I can't do it." This is made clear to us in Numbers 22:8, Numbers 22:13-19, Numbers 22:38, and Numbers 23:12. Again and again, Balaam makes it clear that he cannot override the authority of God.

So this man does know something about God, and you would think that, consequently, he would know better than to try to outmaneuver God. But his covetousness for material gain is so great, as it is for so many Christians, that he will do anything, including trying to outmaneuver God. That's exactly what he proceeds to do. He longed for those riches that Balak offer to him, and he brooded on how to evade the restraint that God had placed on him on three occasions when he tried to curse Israel and could not. Instead, out of his mouth came a blessing. On one occasion, you remember that Balaam even confessed to sin. He realized that he was doing what was wrong. So he was not unaware of it, and he even confessed, and said, "I was wrong. I shouldn't do this." Yet he could not get over trying to get the riches that were dangled before him.

Well, Balaam finally came up with a plan. He finally came up with a way that could outmaneuver God's protective hand over the Jewish people, and bring divine judgment upon them. In the process, he would then be able to earn the reward that Balak had offered him. The plan that he proposed was the plan that was being repeated in the city of Pergamum. That's why we have this reference here to this Old Testament character. God's directive will had said, "No" to Balaam as far as cursing Israel, because they were under His divine favor. But God's permissive will allowed Balaam's negative volition toward the directive will to be expressed, and for Balaam to go to curse the Jews. But God's overruling will prevented the negative volition of Balaam from executing that curse, and from frustrating God's will, which was to protect the Jewish people.

So Balaam just went down the line from God's directive. This is what God says, "I want you to do." Balaam says, "No, I'm negative to all of that. I don't want to do that." So God said, "Alright, I'll let you function in My permissive will." He permitted him to go with Balak's agents. But then God says, "I'm coming in with My overruling will, and you will not curse my people. You will not frustrate My pleasure of blessing them."

**Treatment of the Jewish People**

What was Balaam actually dealing with? What Balaam actually was dealing with here was very serious, because what he was guilty of (among other things) was anti-Semitism. He was actually trying to violate God's protective hand against his earthly people, the Jews, and bring a curse upon them. Balaam, if he had read anything of the Bible (and I have no doubt that he had), should have remembered the doctrinal principles set forth in Genesis 12:3, where God, making his promise to Abraham and his descendants (the Jewish people) said, "And I will bless them that blessed you and curse them that curse you." There is a divine principle which is operational to this day. If you'd like to get a little bit of a healthy dose of divine discipline, just start bringing a curse down upon the Jewish people. Just start persecuting the Jews. Just start giving misery to Jews, and you'll get a very healthy dose of divine discipline. God says that those who mistreat My earthly people, the Jewish nation, will find My curse upon them.

But on the other hand, those who bless them will also find My blessing upon them. God says that only He can discipline the Jews. Because nations have tried to assume this prerogative of God himself to discipline the Jewish people, entire nations in history have risen and fallen. The Assyrian empire, at one time, was a tremendously powerful empire economically, and very powerful militarily. It made some great advances in weaponry so that it was a dominant force in the ancient world. But it made one very great mistake. It became a monumental persecutor of the Jews. And the Assyrian empire, with all its economic strength and all its military power, fell into ruin.

Persia, on the other hand, under Cyrus the Great, deal kindly with the Jewish people, and the Persian Empire prospered tremendously. Alexander the Great treated the Jews with justice. But after his death, some of his generals who succeeded him turned against the Jews and were guilty of anti-Semitism, and their sectors of Alexander's empire crumbled into ruin. Julius Caesar was kind to the Jews, and under Caesar, the Roman Empire took a monumental step forward and prospered.

Spain was the leading nation of the world in the 15th century. Spain was a nation that was strong because of a simple basic reason. It had a strong middle class. It had an economically strong middle class. No nation can ever be powerful unless it has a strong middle class. The reason these emerging nations of the world are so poverty struck and are such incompetent nations is because they have people who are either very rich or very poor, but they have no strong middle class in between of economic stability. Spain had it in a marvelous way, but it so happened that a large part of that middle class were Jews. Believe it or not, in the same year that America was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Isabel and Ferdinand also authorized Torquemada, a Jesuit priest, to begin the Spanish Inquisition in order to drive the Jews out of Spain. They drove the Jews out of Spain. With them, they drove out their national prosperity; their national power; and, their national stability. When they lost that strong middle class, within 50 years, the mighty empire of Spain had degenerated into a poverty-struck nonentity that impressed nobody. By and large, it was because of what they had done to the Jews.

England, in contrast, became a haven for the Jews. The British people rose in stature and in power till the sun never set upon the British Empire. Under Queen Victoria, one of the greatest prime ministers was Disraeli, who was a Jew. History is filled with people who bless the Jew and prosper. Nations which bless the Jew are prospered, and nations which curse the Jew are destroyed.

In our own time, on of the great examples was Hitler's Germany. Hitler's Germany brutalized the Jews as perhaps they had never been brutalized before in their history. The Third Reich, under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party collapsed in flames of divine judgment.

The United States, by and large, has dealt fairly with the Jews. That, in part is why we have prospered as a nation so monumentally. The antichrist in the future is going to pursue a policy of anti-Semitism, just as did Balak and Balaam. Of course, the reason he's going to do it is because there is one person who throughout history is behind anti-Semitism, and that is Satan himself. Satan will be behind the antichrist, and will be moving him against the greatest persecution that the Jews have ever experienced in their history. The reason for this, of course, is that Satan seeks to destroy all the Jewish people. If Satan can wipe out every Jew on the face of the earth, then God has a monumental problem. Then God cannot fulfill his promises to the Jewish nation, and He cannot produce the millennium under the leadership of Jesus and the Jewish people. So that has been Satan's purpose all through history – to somehow circumvent God's plan by getting rid of the Jews.

What we have then is an attempt on the part of Balaam to do what is impossible – to bring curse down upon God's people, and to bring judgment upon them. Balak's purpose was, of course, to simply destroy the Jews – to put them in such a weakened position that their armies (the armies of the pagans) could sweep down and destroy the Jewish military force, and then the Jewish people.

**Balaam's Plan**

So in Revelation 2:14, we read, "I have a few things against you because you have there them that hold the doctrine (or the teaching) of Balaam (which we have just reviewed for you), who taught something to Balak. What did Balaam teach Balak? Balaam finally got his fee. He got the whole fat thing because he came up with a brilliant idea. He sat there and brooded and thought this over, and finally it hit him: "I know how to get God to curse the Jew," and he went running back to the Moabite King Balak, and he says, "I've got the answer. I want you to pay me, and I'm going to tell you what the answer is. I've thought of a way to get God to curse the Jewish people."

So verse 14 says, "He taught Balak to do something:" "to cast." This is the Greek word "ballo." The word "ballo" means simply "to throw." It's in the aorist tense, which means there is a point of setting up something against Israel. It's a point at which King Balak was going to throw something against Israel at Balaam's advice. It's active voice which means that Balak himself is going to throw this against the Jews. And it's infinitive in its mood, which indicates that a purpose is being indicated to us. He threw something at them for a purpose, and what he threw at them is called "a stumbling block." This is the Greek word "skandalon." A "skandalon" originally was the name for the part of a trap to which you attach the bait. If you think of a rat trap, for example, you know there's a little trigger thing that has a little sharp point on it, and that's where you put the piece of food that you want the rat to eat. That used to be referred to as the "skandalon." But in time, the whole thing was called a "skandalon" because it conveyed simply the idea of a trap or a snare.

Balaam gave a plan to Balak which would act as a "skandalon" thrown in the way of the Jewish people to snare them; to capture them; and, to bring down upon them divine judgment. This is the same word which is used in Matthew 16:23 of Satan snaring Peter. Satan snared Peter by throwing something out in Peter's way that Peter would bite on and thus be trapped into. In the New Testament, this word is used of anything which causes people to fall away from divine viewpoint. Anything which causes us to fall away from God's point of view is a "skandalon." It's a trap.

In Romans 9:33, we read about the offense of Jesus Christ. Here, the trap (the snare) was that Christ was a point of prejudice to these people – to the Jews. In Matthew 13:41, we read about things that offend, referring to something that is evil. These are a snare to some people.

In Romans 14:13, this word is used and translated as an occasion to fall, which refers to a means of doing something evil. All of these things referred to somehow trapping a believer into a position where he must violate divine viewpoint, and bring divine judgment upon him.

The snare, we are told, was thrown, "Before the children of Israel." The word "before" is the Greek word "enopios." This word means "in the presence of" or "in the very sight of." So what it is indicating here is that Balaam thought about a snare (a trap) that could be set up visually. It was a visual kind of trap that was going to cause the Jews to bring God's divine judgment upon them. Some kind of a visual trap was what Balaam hit upon, and he explained it to Balak. This trap was thrown up "before the children." This is not a good translation. Here is the Greek word: "huios." "Huios" does not mean "children." It means "son." What we are talking about here is the Jewish males. It was a visual trap advised by Balaam to be set up before the eyes of these Jewish males. They were the men of Israel; that is, the Exodus generation – the Jews who had descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and who had survived the wilderness wanderings. This group of Jewish men had come to maturity during the 40 years in the wilderness wandering, and they now formed the backbone of the military force which was to go in and conquer the Promised Land.

The Jews were unaware of the fact that Balaam was planning treachery against them, and that he was planning to bring God's destruction upon them. Had they known that this was in the wind, they might have been more careful. But it didn't matter because these men had the moral guidelines of Bible doctrine from the Mosaic Law to direct their responses to the snare. When they saw this thing that had been set up to ensnare them, doctrine should have come to the fore and played its role. Had they been positive toward the moral code of the Mosaic Law, and to the directives of the Mosaic Law, they wouldn't have had any trouble at all.

The same is true of us. The same was true of the Pergamum Christians. They also had doctrine to guide their responses to the enticements which Satan was throwing up before them in that city. For all the enticements that Satan is going to throw up before you this week, you have only one hope to survive it, and that is that you function on doctrine which guides you in that particular case. If you don't have any doctrine in your human spirit for God the Holy Spirit to use to direct you, then you're in a lot of trouble. Then you're going to start pulling up the guff of your emotions; the guff of the human viewpoint that you cycle through your mentality; and, all the human viewpoint advice of your other human viewpoint friends, and of our human viewpoint society, and you're going to go no place but down, and you are going to bring God's judgment upon you. These men had the Word; they'd been taught; and, they were without excuse. But Satan is always devising situations to trip up God's people who are careless about doctrine. In Satan's world, the plan is to get at the Christian who doesn't have the orientation to know how to protect himself in the conflict.

What he did was to entice the males of Israel to eat something: "esthio." "Esthio" is simply the word for taking of food. The snare which was set by Balak upon Balaam's advice involved eating something. The grammar here has this as the aorist tense, which means the point at which they fell into the trap and began eating. It's active. These Jewish men chose to eat. It's infinitive. Again, the purpose of Balaam was to get them to eat. The purpose of the snare was to put a visual thing before them so that they would follow through and eat.

What did they eat? "Things sacrificed to idols." Here we have a long Greek word: "eidolothutos." The first part comes from "eidolon" which means "idol," and the last part comes some "thuo" which means "to sacrifice." So the word together means "to sacrifice something to an idol," or "to eat something which has been sacrificed to an idol."

Since demon powers are always worshiped through idols, these offerings were associated with evil. Anytime an offering is made to an idol, you are making an offering to a demonic power. Therefore, there was a certain taint upon the food which was used in offerings to idols.

I've told you before about my own experience one time during World War II when I was in China, visiting in the city of Peking. I came into a temple with our guide, which was a particularly impressive temple. It was very dim in there, and when I walked in I saw two (what I thought) were huge posts. After my eyes got accustomed to the dark, the other Marine officer and I realized that we were looking at a huge, monumental Buddha that was about as tall as this gymnasium, and those were the legs we were looking at. On a little altar-like structure in front of this standing Buddha (the Buddha to long life) were a group of candles burning. I thought I had walked into a Roman Catholic Church. These were the same kind of little votive candles that they burn. Both buy them from the same place, I'm sure. The guide said, "Here," and he handed us a lit paper. He says, "You light candle and have long life." So the other officer took it and he lit the candle. He thought this would help protect him against shortness of life in the Pacific area. But I had reservations when he handed me the paper. I said, "No." One of us had worshipped the demon. I had elected by the grace of God not to. But I do know that lighting that candle was an act of worship to a demon power.

That is what we are confronted with here in this text – food which was offered to a dumb idol. As Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 8, a dumb idol is nothing. That's all it is. It's just a dumb idol. That food is not affected by the fact that you put it on an altar. It's still good food. If it was good steak before, it's still good steak. But there was a problem with the fact that it had been used in worship of a demon. Satan therefore was seeking to bring judgment upon the people of God by causing them to participate in eating something that had been used to worship demons.

This was a problem in the early church, as you may remember, because the early church was confronted with buying meat in the marketplace, which was usually in the temple – meat which had been previously offered in worship. They would take it off the altars of the idol, and they would take it around to another section of the temple grounds where there was a butcher shop, and the best meat to be found in town was there in that temple butcher shop. But it was all meat which had the taint upon it of being offered to idols. The early Christian leaders felt it was wiser to avoid purchase of that kind of food. So in Acts 15:29, Acts 21:25, and 1 Corinthians 8:1ff, we have this explanation: that we should avoid, as believers, buying and eating food which had been offered to idols. The idol is nothing to us. The food used in worship of the idol is harmless in itself, but the danger is in going beyond just that food. The danger is becoming acclimated to a segment of idol worship. That was the point. If you eat the meat now, then you might not mind eating it right there in the presence of the idol. You might not mind even eating it as part of the ceremony of the worship. And you go from one step to the next until you find yourself deeply involved in the idol worship.

What Balaam recommended as a trap was to get the Jewish men to eat meat which had been offered to idols. Where would they do that? Well, they would do that in association with the pagan nations surrounding them, which were worshiping Baal. Baal was indeed one of the most loathsome, corrupt, sexually-debased worships of the ancient world. That's what it was. It was a sex worship. Baal worship was a phallic cult. The whole gamut of all kinds of sexual deviations were practiced: homosexuality; to bestiality; and, right down the line, in the process of the worship of this god. In connection with the worship of Baal was, of course, the food which was offered to him and which was eaten in the feast in the process of worshiping.

So Balaam said, "Set up a situation where these men will be tempted to join in the eating of food, which has been offered to an idol. They will in time be participants in the feast itself, which is the actual act of worship, because they'll go one step at a time. If you get them eating food in the process of the feast, I can guarantee you that God's going to bring judgment upon those men. And," Balaam says, "we'll give them the 'coup de gras' with one more really good visual factor. That is that we'll bring women into the picture, so that we will entice them to commit fornication." The Greek word is "porneuo." "Porneuo" means "to practice sexual immorality." Sometimes it's translated as prostitution: "to practice prostitution."

This is the word which is used in 1 Corinthians 10:8 to describe the sin of the Jews in Balak's trap. There we see this same word used: "Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed, and fell in one day 23,000." Here is describing the judgment that God brought upon these Jewish males for participating in this worship act of sexual immorality. It has a noun form: "porneia." You can immediately see that this is where we get our English word "pornography" for obscene sex. The noun form ("porneia") is used in Matthew 15:19 and in Mark 7:21 to distinguish between fornication: illicit sex with unmarried people; and, adultery with married people. In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, "porneia" is used to include adultery as well as fornication. So the word simply is a general word for sexual immorality apart from the marital status that's involved. Actually, there is a Greek word that does mean adultery only, and that's "moichos." That's the noun form. And then we have "moicheia" which is the verb form. And, "moichao" is another verb form. All those mean specifically adultery. But this word "porneuo" that we have in Revelation is any kind of immoral sexual activity.

Here's the historical background of all this. Balaam advised Balak to use the Midianite women to entice the Jewish men to sin. We have to come back over to the book of Numbers for a moment in order to put the pieces together, so you see the delineations of this fantastically clever plan. In Numbers 31:15-16, Moses has just had his troops returned from an extermination (a search-and-kill campaign) under God's direction to exterminate the Midianite nation. The soldiers have brought back the women alive: "And Moses said unto them, 'Have you saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor,' and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord." These men were ordered to kill all the males and all the non-virgin women. Instead, they brought back some of the non-virgin women, and Moses said, "Don't you realize that these are the women that brought destruction upon us because of Balaam's advice – that this was the visual snare (the trap) that Balaam said, 'Set up before these Jewish men, and get them drawn over here to your girls, and to come into their parties, and into your worship, and into sharing your feast with the worship of Baal, and then to go one step more and actually participate in the sexual immorality which was part of that worship?'" Moses said, "These were the women that were responsible for that, and you brought them back alive?"

The sin was that of joining these Midianite women in their ceremonies of worshiping Baal. Numbers 25:1-5 tell us about that: "Israel abode in Shittim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab, and they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods. And the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor (sex orgies). And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. The Lord said unto Moses, 'Take all the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.' Moses said unto the judges of Israel, 'Slay every one of his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. Baal worship involved feasting on food which had been offered in worship to the idol. They participated in that. It included worship through "porneuo" (illicit sex), and they participated in that. The Midianite females had enticed the Jewish males to join them in their pagan immorality, and the trap was slammed shut.

So Israel was guilty of unfaithfulness to God, and thereby came under divine judgment. The plan worked beautifully. That's exactly what Balaam said to Balak would happen. If he could put out this kind of a visual enticement, you'd bring down God's judgment upon his own people. What happened here is that Moses was commanded by God to execute all the Jewish leaders who had permitted the men to participate in this evil practice. The plague that swept through the camp against the Israelites was finally stopped by an act of Phinehas, who actually walked into a tent and drove a spear through a Midianite woman and a Jewish man. You have that described in Numbers 25:6-9. But Moses was commanded to exterminate the Midianites. You have this described in Numbers 25:16-18 and Numbers 31:1-14. All of these are the indication of God's judgment upon the Jewish people who participated in this, and upon the pagans themselves. That's why Moses sent out his soldiers to execute God's judgment upon them in this way. When they executed this judgment, the plague that had swept down upon the Jews was stopped.

Moses, when he discovered what his soldiers had done in bringing back these women who had been part of Balaam's trap) ordered all of them killed, and they had all the males killed. That left only the little girls, the young virgin women. And the result was that the Midianite nation was wiped out. It was completely destroyed, and their evil along with it.

Now, pulling this all back to Pergamum, here in the book of Revelation, that's the background. You have to know that background to understand what it is that God the Holy Spirit is speaking of here. He's saying that in Pergamum, the same old trap is in operation again. What? To eat things sacrificed to idols, and to participate in the sexual immorality which is associated with idol worship: compromising with the pagans; and, interrelating with them in their worship. In the city of Pergamum, civic life and religious life were completely related. It was very difficult for Christians to have any social life without coming across these pagan practices. They could hardly be invited to anybody's house to eat where the food that they were going to be served was not food which had been first offered to an idol. Some of these Christians in Pergamum were saying, "Let's stop making issues. Let's not make so many waves. Let's be a little more compromising with the pagans round about us." That meant that the Roman world, which was filled with sexual immorality as a way of life, was now being viewed as something that could be tolerated by Christians. This was indeed a way of life which the pagans themselves clearly defended.

I just want to read you a quote from the writer Cicero in his production called Pro Caelio, where he says, "Is there anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden the love of prostitutes? He is extremely severe. I am not able to deny his stated principle, but he is at odds not only with the license, which our own age allows, but also with the customs and concessions of our ancestors. Tell me a time when such a thing was not done. When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was such permission denied? When was it that which is now lawful was not lawful?"

So it was a barnyard type of society, and the leaders (men like Cicero) would stand up and say, "This is our way of life and it's right, and we should defend it." We hear a lot about that today in our day. It's the same kind of line of argument. They add a little qualification. I wouldn't be surprised if they did in the New Testament time at Pergamum: These immoralities and these perversions are alright as long as you do them in love. That will cover it, and justify it.

The Christians faced having to take a position in civic life which protested against that kind of action. You would think that there'd be no question but what they would. Well, lo and behold, 1 Corinthians 5 shows us what kind of a lifestyle of morality we would expect among Christians who had come into the church (into the age of grace). In 1 Corinthians 5:1-6, Paul says. "It is reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the gentiles (that is among the unbelievers), that one should have his father's wife." I remind you again that I am reading a letter written to a Christian congregation, and someone is standing up some Sunday, and they are reading this letter from the apostle Paul, and they are talking to this congregation. Everybody in the congregation knows exactly what he's talking about. They know who the guilty party is, and what he has done, and what the base moral practice is that he's been engaged in, and the fact that all the rest of them as Christians did not rise up in holy indignation and say, "You can't do that. We put you under church discipline, and we restrict fellowship from you." Instead, they just let it go on. They just turned the other way and said, "OK, that's OK. Go ahead. Keep doing it." Why? Because they acclimated themselves to the lifestyle of the age:

"And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned that he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that has done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus." Paul says, "I've already passed judgment upon it, and I'm directing you to execute my judgment as an apostle, and I'm calling upon you to respect my apostolic authority. I want you to bring discipline upon this man. I want you to take him, and I want you to formally deliver him to Satan. Satan will then take him over and begin bringing physical ailments upon him to the destruction of his body. If he will not repent and confess and turn from that sin, then Satan will be permitted by God to go all the way and take his life."

He is a believer because the spirit and soul will be saved. That's the indication we have here. But his body will receive complete destruction. You might say, "But that's hard to believe. That's a group of Christians we're talking about." That's how it was, folks. That's just how it was in the early New Testament world. It was very difficult for Christians to come out of the kind of loose morality they were used to, and come to the kind of strict morality that the Word of God says a normal human being is expected to practice. Christians worshiping with non-Christians led to this kind of compromising with the world system, and James calls it spiritual adultery.

If you're guilty of that now, I would certainly call upon you, on the authority of the Word of God, to cease and desist. I call upon you to reprogram yourself; to change your ways; and, to recognize that, while you are of the royal family of God and part of the royal priesthood and therefore you stand on the most magnificent blessing that God has ever had for any group of people that ever lived, He will treat you just exactly the way these Jewish men were treated when they worshipped at Baalpeor, and they fell into the practice of honoring these demon gods, and of practicing their sexual immorality. God will bring the same judgment upon those of us who are members of His Son's body. You will not escape. You play yourself a very foolish role: short-term gains for long-term losses.

Why not follow Moses's pattern whom the Scriptures tell us rejected the pleasures of Egypt for a season, and aligned himself with the people of God and the principles of the Word of God to enjoy the blessings of eternity.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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