

Rev 25-10-15b

We are looking at these seven churches and it is so fascinating, there is so much material there. It's a challenge to keep moving forward through it, but we are going to strive manfully onward and do so. Looking at this, the second church, having looked at Ephesus and we've already looked in detail at the promise to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God, is a blessing specifically attached to overcoming situations such as exist in Ephesus.

And it is so pertinent to where we are. We are in a prosperous, almost overly prosperous and very materialistic and superficial world where success is measured by metrics that are not biblical. People come to fame and notoriety and influence by doing the strangest things usually on the internet and actual accomplishments of substance such as settling wars and achieving peace in the Middle East and other things are given short shrift, someone finds.

The funniest thing I saw this past week was somebody complaining that the president didn't do it sooner. What took him so long? And I thought, the man's been in office about nine months, nine and a half months, and you're complaining that he didn't do it fast enough. But it is any time you hear unwarranted criticism and twisted and superficial analysis of things, just remember the way the Lord Jesus was treated.

He was perfect. He was perfect. And yet he was criticized to the point of execution.

So whatever happens in the world, our standard is spiritual. Our goal is to be pleasing in God's sight regardless of what the world says. But as you continue looking at this, they in Ephesus lost the heart that needed to infuse their actions with meaning and dedication as unto the Lord.

And you find God addressing this problem with Israel in Jeremiah's day, Jeremiah 2,2, God tells Jeremiah, go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, thus says the Lord, I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. The early enthusiasm, the dedication, the recognition that this is a personal God who is personally interested in us, both individually and as a group. And it is possible to substitute a real march on purity and an attempt to root out heresy or doctrinal problems and feel accomplished in finding an error and rooting it out and weeding it out, identifying it and getting rid of it.

And that this becomes the measure of accomplishment. Did I get that biblical teaching straight and did I argue against and remove some falsehood? And doctrinal purity becomes an end in itself. Doctrinal purity is no more than a means to an end.

We need genuine truth to fuel us. It is as though you don't want to have gasoline that's got water or dirt in it and try to put that into your engine. You need pure fuel, but pure fuel to put into your engine isn't a substitute for running the engine and having it do whatever work you need to do, whether it's mow the lawn, drag logs with a chain, brush hog, blade your driveway.

I'm thinking in tractor terms because I'm working on my tractor right now. But pure fuel is a wonderful thing, but the purpose of the fuel is to get it into the tank so that you can do the things that really need to be done. It's essential, but it's not final, if you see my point.

That's what the Ephesians lost. So how did they return? We saw the answers. First of all, remember.

If you think about the prodigal son back in Luke chapter 15, he goes out and wastes his living with riotous pleasures and fair-weather friends and all that, and then he loses it all. He is prodigal with his inheritance and spends it all, and he ends up at the hog trough. And in verse 17 of Luke 15, it says, but when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I am here perishing with hunger.

He remembered his former situation when he was satisfied, when he was nourished, when he was welcomed and in the fellowship of his father and his family. And he said, then I will return. And that's the second stage, to repent.

And that's Luke 15, 18. I will arise and go to my father. I will say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

Repentance. Remember what it's supposed to be like. What it perhaps was like in the beginning, and get back to that.

Repent, and then do. Still continue to do what you're doing, but do it for the right reasons. Present ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

And if that sacrifice is consumed in the process of dedication, if we literally work ourselves to death, if we endure hardship as good soldiers of Christ Jesus, that's a part of it. We do it willingly. Look at what the Lord sacrificed for us in his earthly life.

We can certainly live sacrificially to self and beneficially to the cause of Christ and to those things that we have been called to. But then the Lord Jesus says, this you have, that you have hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. I learned something new about the Nicolaitans.

I don't know how I didn't put this together. One of my favorite things is when I hear a name or a term, and it brings to mind a biblical name or a biblical term, I am quick to identify it. I tuned a piano yesterday and a little guy came up that's learning the piano.

And I said, what's your name? And he said, it's Levi. And I thought, boy, that is just great. What a great biblical name.

Of course, as is typical of my customers, this is a whole family of believers. And so they named him Levi on purpose. But I thought, what a cool name.

It's the priestly tribe and so on. But here's the thing. Let me see if you are as surprised about

this as I am.

How much mystery has surrounded the Nicolaitans? Are they followers of Nicolaus, who was one of the people picked in Acts chapter five or so to be one of the deacons, along with Stephen and other guys, and some other people? And later church fathers, they always try to connect things together, whether they actually connect or not. They said, oh, the Nicolaitans, they were followers of Nicolaus. He was a good guy.

He told them that they shouldn't be catering to the needs of the body. But they confused this with Gnosticism and that what you do in the body doesn't matter. And so they became all kinds of bodily pleasure people.

And it doesn't count against my spiritual life because it's just the body. But take a look at this. You remember the Greek, right? And by the way, this has a point.

I'm going somewhere with this. Niko comes from Nike, like the shoes. That means conquer, victory.

And then Laos is the people. So you are the master of, the conqueror of, the, in some cases, ruler over the people. Niko Laos.

You're the person over the people. You're victorious and therefore you can tell the people what to do, right? So, if you skip down to our third church, beginning in verse 12, the angel of the church in Pergamos, these things says, he who has the sharp two-edged sword, by the way, we all love a good chiasm, right? You've got the seven churches and we've seen that it is chiastic and structured. You've got Thyatira in the middle, three leading in, three leading out.

The outside ones correspond, Smyrna and Philadelphia correspond and so on. However, the first three churches themselves are a chiasm. The first and third correspond and Smyrna is in the middle.

The last three are a mini chiasm and Philadelphia is in the middle. Sardis and Laodicea connect in the same way that Ephesus and Pergamos connect. We're about to look at that connection here in Pergamos.

So these things says, he who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. What did he tell those in Ephesus, synagogue of Satan? Here Satan has a throne.

You hold fast to my name. You did not deny my faith, even in the days. Doesn't it hark back to Ephesus? You're doing some things right.

You have held fast. You haven't been diverted. You haven't been perverted.

You've not denied the faith, even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr. That goes to Smyrna, who was killed among you where Satan dwells. Satan mentioned a second time.

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, sacrifice to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Thus, you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which things I hate. I want you to notice when we're trying to figure out the Nicolaitans, you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but it is linked to verse 14 by the word thus because you have the doctrine of Balaam, thus you have the Nicolaitans.

Now, we've parsed the Greek word Nicolaitan. Stop and think about Balaam. Where does the name Balaam come from? What are its component parts? Do you recognize the first four letters? Baal, Lord.

Going back to Semitic languages, including Canaanite languages and Baal means Lord. What does Am mean in Hebrew? I've mentioned this before. You may or may not remember it.

Ha'am is the people. So what does the name Balaam translate to? Lord of the people, victor over the people. Balaam and Nicolaitan are essentially the same thing.

One is in Hebrew and one is in Greek. But Laos is people. Am is people.

Baal is Lord, Master. Nike, Nikao, that's to rule over, lord over, to conquer, to dominate a people. They both mean the same thing.

So if you have the doctrine of Balaam, thus you have the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Notice, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans in verse six. Here you have the doctrine of the Nicolaitans in verse 16.

And you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which things I hate, because in verse 14, you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak. This is a teaching. It's a construction of reality.

It is a perpetration of philosophy and thinking that results in deeds. The doctrine precedes the action. This is why we observe and interpret.

We try to arrive at a truth and then it takes application in the form of our thoughts, words and actions. But the thinking, the persuasion that this is truth, this is what needs to happen, precedes making things happen. So with this linkage, notice the detail that begins to come to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which is the doctrine of Balaam.

Balaam taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel to do what? To eat things, sacrifice to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Flip back. Keep your finger here in Revelation.

Go back to Acts chapter 15 when it becomes apparent that God is accepting Gentiles into the faith. Verse 19, this is Jerusalem James speaking. Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but we write to them to do what?

There's four things here.

Abstain from things polluted by idols, from things strangled, from blood and from sexual immorality. Those four things. Do you recognize any of those in our context? Food offered to idols, meat offered to idols.

Meat in the Bible often means food or it can be any kind of consumable offering. Sexual immorality or fornication, things strangled and from blood. Things strangled and blood is also food related.

And these were pagan practices among the Gentiles. And they said this is an abomination to the Lord and should not be a part of or associated with Christian worship. So basically, pagan ideas about food and sexual immorality.

So when you think about this, think about Paul in 1st Corinthians chapter 6, verse 12. He has just said in verse 11, some of you were covetous thieves, drunkards, revilers, extortioners and all of these fornicators. Idolaters, adulterers and so on will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Doesn't say they won't see it. Doesn't say even that they won't enter it. It says they will not inherit.

And as we have seen in past studies, those are three separate things. Pay attention to the relationship to the future kingdom of God. Will you even see it? Will you only see it? Will you have the opportunity to enter it or will you be confined to the outside? And are you only entering to visit like a tourist or will you inherit and dwell there? These patterns of behavior obviate, they cancel, they negate, they make impossible inheriting in the kingdom.

And it's quite a list. Then in verse 12, all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. They're not up building, they're not edifying.

All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. If we find things compelling us, we are in the grip and we seem unable to resist. These are your addictions.

These are your abusive behaviors with regard to various substances and various behaviors. People addicted to gambling, addicted to various things. I will not be brought under the power of any.

We should only be under the power of God, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. If something else addicts us, compels us, overwhelms our willpower, we've got to get that fixed. Then he says in verse 13, foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods.

This is a quote. This is a saying that was heard in Corinth and elsewhere in the Gentile world, the pagan Roman Empire. Well, you know, the whole reason you've got a stomach is to eat food and food is prepared to appeal to the stomach.

So they're made for each other. You've got a stomach, you've got to eat these foods. And it

doesn't matter what you eat.

If your stomach likes it, you're good to go. This this becomes the naturalistic argument for things in the modern day. Well, young people have an appetite for physical intimacy.

It's natural. So it's OK. Just teach them to practice safe sex or whatever.

It's natural. And this saying, even in this context, is being applied in a wider sense. The Gentiles applied this idea to fornicating with temple prostitutes and doing other kinds of nefarious things outside of marriage.

Not that you should do nefarious things inside of marriage, but they were very promiscuous. And they said, well, you know, the body was made for this. It's natural in the same way that the stomach was made for food and food was made for the stomach.

Paul adds, God will destroy both it and them. He will destroy the stomach and the foods. What is going to go into the eternal future? And this is what Paul is going to lead up to when you get to chapter 15, talking about resurrection and the body is going to return.

But these sensual appetites don't return with it. Those will be destroyed. The body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Don't be driven by earthly, sensual, materialistic appetites of any kind. God has raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not.

Do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? The two, he says, shall become one flesh. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Flee sexual immorality.

Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. This is a double entendre. He is sinning against his own personal flesh, but he is also sinning against the body of which he is a part, the body of Christ.

You sin against the body of Christ. People think, well, this is just me doing my own thing over here. I'm not hurting anybody.

It's consensual me and whoever this is. And by way of principle, by way of principle, engaging with the world, even when this is mental, it's over the Internet or it's entertainment of some kind. It is stimulation or something that gratifies us.

And we partake of the world and we're bringing the world not only into our own soul and using our own bodily senses to do it, but because we are connected to the body of Christ, we are a channel of corruption and infection for the body of Christ. You are not your own. You are bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God in your body. That's how he concludes in verse 20. We have to remember what we do is not isolated to us.

This is like a workstation on a network. Hackers who want to get into a network and it's got tremendous security. It's got firewalls.

It's got safeties. It's got all kinds of protection. The way they get in is one person.

They call them up on the phone and they get them to just give their password. We're hi, I'm I.T. We're just we're going to upgrade your software, but I need to reboot. And so I'll need your password so that when I reboot the machine, I can log in and they'll remote in and actually do that.

And it all looks on the up and up to the person who is operating that workstation. But by giving their password, they have given an end to the entire network, the whole system, the proprietary information. Everything is at risk because they have unknowingly and inadvertently allowed the enemy into the gates when we sin.

And we think, well, that was just me. Sorry, we are all connected to the body of Christ and in ways we cannot even imagine, understand or know the enemy can attack from within. We don't know that we are being observed.

We don't know that that this is having an effect on someone else. And this metastasizes, it spreads, it finds new locations to take root and grow. Well, so and so seems to be unconcerned about this.

So maybe I shouldn't be concerned about it. And first thing you know, the weaker brother is caused to stumble because we're not careful about not only doctrinal purity, but what we do. And the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam is.

It's OK. This is natural. And Balaam taught Balak, the king of the Moabites, how to trip Israel up.

He couldn't get them cursed. He couldn't get the word from the mountain. He couldn't get Balaam to say doctrinal words that would curse Israel.

Every time Balaam spoke, it was the word of truth that God was going to bless Israel. That was God's policy. That's God's intention.

That's God's plan and purpose. So how did Israel stumble if God did nothing but bless them through Balaam? Because that same Balaam gave Balak the vulnerability. How many times do you read in history that there was an impregnable city, but somebody told an invading army about a back way in, or they watched somebody use a secret entrance and followed him back in, or they drained the water out from under the gate and go in through the water source? David is going to take Jebus, Jerusalem.

He's going to take the city by finding a hidden way in. So important not only to have doctrinal

purity, but to have that define our practice. The doctrine of Balaam results in fornication and eating foods sacrificed to idols, which inevitably leads you into the idolatry realm where all kinds of other nefarious things take place because they didn't identify it.

Well, Balaam, here's the guy that blessed us, so this must be okay. And the Moabites could come and say, well, you know, Balaam says this is okay, and he's a prophet of God. Remember all those blessings he pronounced? Admixture, corruption, defilement, perversion of truth, twisting of truth, and mixing it with error is the way in.

This is how the Nicolaitans got people to do things that Jesus hates. He hates their doctrine. He hates the things and the works that result from it.

So more light being shed here because Balaam is the same as Nike Laos. You get the people to do stuff they shouldn't do. That's the technique.

That's the way. So back to Revelation chapter two. To the angel of the church in Pergamos, verse 12, the messenger of the church, these things says he who has the sharp two edged sword.

This is the word of truth that divides us under the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow, and is a judge, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Has to be a sharp sword. Can't let it get dull.

Can't let it be blunted. Can't let somebody take it away and use something else. I know your works.

You dwell where Satan's throne is, but you hold fast to my name. You did not deny my faith even in the days where Antipas was my faithful martyr, killed among you where Satan dwells. You could ask yourself the question, why was Antipas allowed to die? Once you ask that question, you can say.

God didn't prevent Stephen from being stoned to death. Antipas is faithful and he is faithful unto death. He is an example to Smyrna.

People in Smyrna are going to continue to read past their own letter. And the Lord Jesus commends those who do not deny the faith, even when they see one of their own martyred for it. He was faithful unto death.

The faithful martyr Antipas. Notice Antipas is unknown otherwise, but his name is in the eternal scriptures because he was faithful unto death. Didn't give up, didn't give out, didn't give in, didn't quit, trusted the Lord, though he slay me, I will trust him.

Just as we're going to see the two witnesses will do later in this book, they will prevail. They will be victorious and they will be faithful unto death. They are going to receive the crown of life.

Momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory. Nobody can ever take the crown of life away

from those who receive it. You can give it away, but this crown can and should never be lost.

Be faithful unto death. I have a few things against you. Verse 14.

You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. What happens in the modern day to people of faith, to young people who grow up in an evangelical church where they get good, solid teaching of the Bible in Sunday school and so on? What happens? Well, you know that a lot of these books in the Bible that claim to be by so-and-so, they'll generally attack the New Testament, you know, Mark wasn't really written by Mark and Matthew wasn't really written by Matthew. And, you know, 1st Corinthians is not a real book.

It's a forgery. Paul didn't write it. So everything in 1st Corinthians you can throw out, including that part about how homosexuals and perverts are not going to inherit the kingdom.

Paul didn't write that. It's not scripture. So that doesn't count.

You can't throw it out. You need to embrace homosexuals and bring them into the big tent of love and peace and joy. And don't worry about that.

That's not a real letter. And they throw a stumbling block in front of the faith. They cause weaker brethren to stumble and they end up eating things, sacrifice to idols and committing sexual immorality.

What they take in and what they practice. Revelation is a book of symbolism and metaphor. It isn't just who can find any food that was offered to an idol in the modern day.

But you imbibe things that are prohibited. Even the Jerusalem church, with its problems, understood that you should abstain from association with idolatry. Don't compromise with it.

Paul says, if you're mature, don't cause a stumbling block for weaker brethren by quibbling about where the food came from. But if you hear that it was set before an idol, then don't eat it because that's an issue. It was an issue in Jerusalem.

It was an issue for Paul. And it's an issue here. And if you cause people who aren't strong to move in bad directions with what they take in, with what they accept, with what they imbibe, what goes into them, that's a problem.

And then their application, instead of marriages and families and so on, you have fornication and sexual immorality of all different kinds. Thus, you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which things I hate. Notice, Jesus began in Ephesus by saying, I hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

In verse 15, you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. There's a subtle distinction here. There are people who hold with that.

I hate that doctrine. And you are tolerating people who hold that doctrine. So the issue shifts from, is the doctrine wrong? The Ephesians said that doctrine is wrong.

I am rejecting it. I'm expunging it. I'm getting rid of it from our group and from our vicinity.

But there are those who hold, in verse 14, the doctrine of Balaam, and there are those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. There are people in the group who hold these doctrines. Therefore, Jesus says in verse 16, change your mind or I will come to you quickly and fight against you with the sword of my mouth, because I'm going to have to cleave out these people that you are tolerating.

You have got to ask people to leave who are dedicated to these doctrines, who hold these doctrines, who will talk and promulgate these ideas in your group. They have got to go. The Ephesians were smart enough to move the false teachers out.

Paul encouraged that. Had Timothy remind them of that. Get rid of the false teachers.

But in Pergamos, they have allowed them to continue. They're tolerating them. They're listening to them.

They're saying, well, you know, let's go around the group. What do you think? Well, I think doctrine of Balaam. Well, I think doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which is virtually identical.

Jesus says, I will come. And isn't it something Jesus will fight against his own church? This reminds you of Rambo having to dig a bullet out of himself and stitch up the wound. Jesus is going to have to apply the sword, the sharp sword from his mouth to his own church, to his own body, to keep it healthy.

I will come and fight against you with the sword of my mouth. I don't want the Lord Jesus fighting against me and mine. I don't want the Lord Jesus feeling that he needs to come to our church and fight against it with the sword of his mouth.

Now, the sword of his mouth is the word of God. And correct doctrine is what is going to identify and eliminate bad teaching. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. Not only the word of God, the sharp sword, not only the words that we already have, there is hidden manna available to those who are deceived. Those who are dedicated to truth and will not tolerate the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, much less the deeds that spring from those.

The eating of things offered to idols, the fornicating, whether physical or spiritual. Hidden manna and a white stone and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it. There are things beyond our comprehension alluded to in these promises to the overcomers.

What an exciting prospect. It is one thing to be doctrinally pure. It is another thing to ensure that our actions comport with that doctrine and are motivated out of love for God and love for one another.

That's Ephesus. We may have to endure a great trial and testing. We may be imprisoned from forces within or without for our faith.

Be faithful unto death. That's Smyrna. Watch out for those who attack from within.

Ephesus kept those attacks on the outside and wouldn't let him come in. There are enemies in the camp in Pergamos. And Jesus says, you have got to fix that.

You've got to change your mind about allowing those people to persist and to stay. You need to call them out. You need to identify.

This is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It's not some abstraction of false teaching. It's a specific teaching.

It's the doctrine of Balaam. It's a specific teaching with specific results. Association with idolatry, imbibing that which is associated with idolatry, expunge it.

If you put something ahead of God, if your patriotism, if your family love, if your hobby, if your entertainment, if your activities, whatever it may be. If this takes the place of foremost love for God and foremost love for God's people, the one and others, you've got a problem. Fix it.

Because knowing it or not, you're following the doctrine of Balaam and it is going to cause you to sin. You're following the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and it is going to cause you to sin and to be a danger to the rest of the body. Glorify God in your body.

It is connected to the body of Christ. What we do, even in secret, even in private, even in our own mind, we are connected to the body. Don't be that person with a workstation that lets a virus in, that lets someone attack the entire system through an unaware and uncared vulnerability.

That shouldn't be us. Well, plenty to chew on here. These letters are so practical and so helpful in our day.

This is a day of exciting events taking place around the world and in our own nation. And the hockey stick graph, every time you move to the right, things move up. We are close.

We need to be prepared. And the preparation is personal. It is individual.

It is to be a blessing to the body, to be dedicated to the Lord Jesus. Blessed is that servant that is faithfully serving when the master returns. That's what we want to do.

This is the way to do it. Doesn't get any better than that. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how well it equips us for every good work. If we pray to God, the Holy Spirit will take these truths and make them flame and live in our souls so that we can see clearly where we need to repent, where we need to remember, where we need to make a fresh start of application, recover in any area of our life where we have lost our foremost love, and do the foremost works.

Those that are pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Lord Jesus, we ask it in his name. Amen.