

Revelation 2:15, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."

You will recall that I brought out in the Ephesian Age that the word, Nicolaitane, comes from two Greek words: Nikao which means to conquer, and Lao which means the laity. Nicolaitane means, "to conquer the laity." Now why is this such a terrible thing? It is terrible because God has never placed His church in the hands of an elected leadership which moves with political mindedness. He has placed His church in the care of God-ordained, Spirit-filled, Word-living men who lead the people through feeding them the Word. He has not separated the people into classes so that the masses are led by a holy priesthood. It is true that the leadership must be holy, but then so must be the whole congregation. Further, there is no place in the Word where priests or ministers or such mediate between God and the people, nor is there a place where they are separated in their worship of the Lord. God wants all to love and serve Him together. Nicolaitanism destroys those precepts and instead separates the ministers from the people and makes the leaders overlords instead of servants. Now this doctrine actually started as a deed in the first age. It appears that the problem lay in two words: "elders" (presbyters) and "overseers" (bishops). Though Scripture shows that there are several elders in each church, some began (Ignatius among them) to teach that the idea of a bishop was one of preeminence or authority and control over the elders. Now the truth of the matter is the word "elder" signifies who the person is, while the word "bishop" signifies the office of the same man. The elder is the man. Bishop is the office of the man. "Elder" always has and always will refer simply to a man's chronological age in the Lord. He is an elder, not because he is elected or ordained, etc., but because he IS OLDER. He is more seasoned, trained, not a novice, reliable because of experience and long standing proof of his Christian experience. But no, the bishops did not stick to the epistles of Paul, but rather they went to Paul's account of the time he called the elders from Ephesus to Miletus in Acts 20. In verse 17 the record states, "elders" were called and then in verse 28 they are called overseers (bishops). And these bishops, (no doubt political minded and anxious for power) insisted that Paul had given the meaning that "overseers" were more than the local elder with official capacity only in his own church. To them a bishop was now one with extended authority over many local leaders. Such a concept was neither Scriptural nor historical, yet even a man of the stature of Polycarp leaned toward such organization. Thus, that which started as a deed in the first age was made a literal doctrine and so it is today. Bishops still claim power to control men and deal with them as they desire, placing them where they so will in the ministry. This denies the leadership of the Holy Ghost Who said, "Separate Me Paul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them." This is anti-Word and anti-Christ. Matthew 20:25-28, "But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 23:8-9, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for One is your Father, Which is in heaven."

In order to clarify this even more, let me explain Nicolaitanism in this way. You recall that in Revelation 13:3 it says, "And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death: and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast." Now we know that the wounded head was the pagan Roman Empire, that great political world power. This head rose again as the "Roman Catholic spiritual empire." Now watch this carefully. What did political pagan Rome do that was the basis of her success? She, "divided and conquered." That was the seed of Rome --- divide and conquer. Her iron teeth tore and devoured. Whom she tore and devoured could not rise again as when she destroyed Carthage and sowed her to salt. The same iron seed remained in her when she arose as the false church, and her policy has remained the same --- divide and conquer. That is Nicolaitanism and God hates it.

Now it is a well known historical fact that when this error crept into the church, men began to vie for the office of bishop with the result that this position was being given to the more educated and materially-progressive and politically-minded men. Human knowledge and program began to take over Divine wisdom's place and the Holy Spirit no longer controlled. This was indeed a tragic evil, for the bishops began to maintain that it no longer required a transparent Christian character to minister either the Word or the rites in the church for it was the elements and the ceremony that counted. This allowed evil men (seducers) to rend the flock.

With the man-made doctrine of the elevation of bishops to a place not accorded them in Scripture, the next step was the handing out of graded titles that built up into a religious hierarchy; for soon there were archbishops over bishops and cardinals over the archbishops and by the time of Boniface the third there was a pope over all, a Pontiff.

What with the Nicolaitane doctrine and the amalgamation of Christianity with Babylonianism the net results had to be what Ezekiel saw in chapter 8:10, "So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall around." Revelation 18:2, "And he cried mightily, with a strong voice saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and cage of every unclean and hateful bird, for all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornications."

Now this Nicolaitane doctrine, this rule that was established in the church did not hit it off too well with a lot of the people for they could read the odd epistle or essay on the Word written by some godly person. So what did the church do? It excommunicated the righteous teachers and burned the scrolls. They said, "It takes a special education to read and understand the Word. Why even Peter said that many things Paul wrote were hard to understand." Having taken away the Word from the people, it soon came to the people listening only to what the priest had to say, and doing what he told them. They called that God and His holy Word. They took over the minds and lives of the people and made them the servants of a despotic priesthood.

Now if you want proof that the Catholic Church demands the lives and minds of men, just listen to the edict of Theodosius X. Theodosius' First Edict.

This edict was issued immediately after he was baptized by the First Church of Rome. "We three emperors will that our subjects steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by Saint Peter to the Romans, which has been faithfully preserved by tradition and which is now professed by the pontiff, Damasus of Rome, and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of Apostolic holiness according to the institution of the Apostles, and the doctrine of the Gospel; let us believe in one Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of equal majesty in the Holy Trinity. We order that the adherents of this faith be called Catholic Christians; we brand all the senseless followers of the other religions with the infamous name of heretics, and forbid their conventicles assuming the name of churches. Besides the condemnation of divine justice, they must expect the heavy penalty which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom shall think proper to inflict . . ."

The fifteen penal laws that this emperor issued in as many years deprived the evangelicals of all rights to the exercise of their religion, excluded them from all civil offices, and threatened them with fines, confiscation, banishment and even in some cases, death.

Do you know what? We are headed right that way today.

The Roman Catholic Church calls herself the Mother church. She calls herself the first or original church. That is absolutely correct. She was the original First Church of Rome that backslid and went into sin. She was the first that organized. In her was found the deeds and then the doctrine of Nicolaitanism. No one will deny that she is a mother. She is a mother and has produced daughters. Now a daughter comes out of a woman. A woman robed in scarlet is sitting on the seven hills of Rome. She is a harlot and has borne daughters. Those daughters are the Protestant churches that came out of her and then went right back into organization and Nicolaitanism. This Mother of the daughter-churches is called a whore. That is a woman who was untrue to her marriage vows. She was married to God and then went off fornicating with the devil and in her fornications she has brought forth daughters that are just like her. This mother and daughter combination is anti-Word, anti-Spirit and consequently anti-Christ. Yes, ANTICHRIST.

Now before I get too far along I want to mention that these early bishops thought that they were above the Word. They told people they could forgive their sins upon confession of those sins. That never was the truth. They began to baptize infants in the second century. They actually practiced regenerational baptism. No wonder people are mixed up today. If they were so mixed up then, so close to Pentecost, now they are in a most desperate condition, being about two thousand years away from original truth.

Oh, Church of God, there is only one hope. Get back to the Word and stay with it.

The Doctrine of Balaam

Revelation 2:14, "Thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

Now you just can't have a Nicolaitane set-up in the church and not have this other doctrine come in, too. You see, if you take away the Word of God and the moving of the Spirit as a means of worship ("they that worship Me must worship Me in Spirit and in truth") then you will have to give the people another form of worship as a substitute, and substitution spells Balaamism.

If we are going to understand what the doctrine of Balaam is in the New Testament church we had better go back and see what it was in the Old Testament church and apply it to that third age and then bring it up to the present.

The story is found in Numbers Chapters 22 through 25. Now we know that Israel was the chosen people of God. They were the Pentecostals of their day. They had taken refuge under the blood, they had all been baptized in the Red Sea and they came up out of the waters, singing in the Spirit and dancing under the energy of the Holy Ghost, while Miriam, the prophetess, played her tambourine. Well, after a certain time of journeying, these children of Israel came to Moab. You remember who Moab was. He was the son of Lot by one of his own daughters, and Lot in turn was a nephew of Abraham, so Israel and Moab were related. I want you to see that. The Moabites knew the truth, whether they lived up to it or not.

So Israel came up to the borders of Moab and sent messengers to the king saying, "We are brothers. Let us pass through your land. If our people or our animals eat or drink anything, we will gladly pay for it." But King Balak got very excited. That head of that Nicolaitane bunch was not about to let the church come through with its signs and wonders and divers manifestations of the Holy Ghost, with their faces shining with the glory of God. It was too risky, as he might lose some of his crowd. So Balak refused to let Israel pass through. In fact, so great was his fear of them, that he went to an hireling prophet called Balaam and asked him to mediate between him and God, and petition the Almighty to curse Israel, and render them impotent. And Balaam, being eager to take part in political affairs and become a great man, was only too glad to do so. But seeing that he had to approach to, and receive an audience from God to get the people cursed, as he could not do it by himself, he went to ask God if he could have His permission to go. Now isn't that just like the Nicolaitanes we have with us today? They curse everyone that won't go their way.

When Balaam asked God for permission to go, God turned him down. My that stung! But Balak insisted, promising him even greater rewards and honor. So Balaam went back to God. Now one answer from God should have been enough. But not for self-willed Balaam. When God saw his perversity, He told him to get up and go. Quickly he saddled the donkey and away he went. He should have realized that this was simply God's permissive will and he wouldn't be able to curse them if he went twenty times and tried twenty times. How like Balaam are people today! They believe in three Gods, get baptized in three titles instead of the NAME, and yet God will send the Spirit upon them as He did upon Balaam, and they will go on believing that they are exactly right, and here they are actually perfect Balaamites. See, the doctrine of Balaam. Go ahead anyway. Do it your way. They say, "Well, God has blessed us. It must be alright." I know He has blessed you. I don't deny that. But it's the same organizational route that Balaam took. It's defiance to God's Word. It's false teaching.

So Balaam went wildly down the road until an angel from God stood in his way. But that prophet (bishop, cardinal, chairman, president and general overseer) was so blinded to Spiritual things by the thought of honor and glory and money, that he could not see the angel standing with drawn sword. There he stood to block the mad prophet. The little donkey saw him and dodged back and forth until he finally crushed Balaam's foot against a stone wall. The ass stopped and would not go on. He could not. So Balaam jumped off and began beating him. The donkey then began to talk to Balaam. God let that donkey speak in a tongue. That donkey was no hybrid; he was original seed. He said to the blinded prophet, "Am I not your donkey, and haven't I carried you faithfully?" Balaam replied, "Yes, yes, you are my donkey and you have carried me faithfully until now; and if I can't get you going, I'm going to kill you . . ." "Whoa! What's this, talking to a donkey? That's funny, I thought I heard the donkey talking and I was answering it back."

God has always spoken in a tongue. He spoke at Belshazzar's feast and then at Pentecost. He is doing it again today. It's a warning of soon coming judgment.

Then the angel was made visible to Balaam. He told Balaam that except for the donkey he would be dead even now for tempting God. But when Balaam promised to go back, he was sent on with the admonition to say only what God gave him.

So Balaam went down and set up seven altars for the clean beasts of sacrifice. He killed a ram signifying the coming of the Messiah. He knew what to do to approach unto God. He had the mechanics just right; but not the dynamics; same as now. Can't you see it, Nicolaitanes? There was Israel down there in the valley, offering the same sacrifice, doing the same things, but only one had the signs following. Only one had God in their midst. Form won't get you anywhere. It can't take the place of Spirit-manifestation. That is what happened at Nicaea. They put over Balaam's doctrine, not the doctrine of God. And they stumbled; yea they fell. They became dead men.

After the sacrifice was made, Balaam was ready to prophesy. But God tied his tongue up and he could not curse them. He blessed them.

Balak was very angry, but there was nothing that Balaam could do about the prophecy. It had been spoken by the Holy Ghost. So Balak told Balaam to go down below, into the valley, and look upon their back parts to see if there wasn't possibly some way he could curse them. The tactics that Balak used are the same tactics they use today. The big denominations look down at the little groups, and anything they find amongst them to make out a scandal they bring it out and shout it. If the moderns live in sin, no one says anything about it; but let one of the elect get into trouble and every paper blasts it across the country. Yes, Israel had her back (carnal) parts. They had their side that wasn't praise-worthy; but in spite of their imperfections, by the purpose of God that works through election, by grace and not by works, **THEY HAD THE CLOUD BY DAY AND THE PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT, THEY HAD THE SMITTEN ROCK, THE BRAZEN SERPENT AND THE SIGNS AND WONDERS.** They were vindicated - --- not in themselves, but in God.

God didn't have any respect for those Nicolaitanes with their PHD's, LLD'S and DD'S and all their fine organizations and the best that man could boast; but He did have respect unto Israel for they had the Word vindicated amongst them. Certainly Israel didn't look too polished up, just having come out of Egypt in precipitous flight, but she was a blessed people anyway. All she had ever known for over three hundred years was herding flocks, tending fields and slaving away in fear of death under the Egyptians. But she was free now. She was a blessed people through the sovereignty of God. Certainly Moab looked down on her. All the other nations did, too. Organization always looks down on the unorganized and either will, by determination, bring them into organization or destroy them when they won't come.

Now someone might ask me, "Brother Branham, what makes you think that Moab was organized while Israel was not? Where do you get that idea?" I get it right here in the Bible. It is all typed out here. Everything written in the Old Testament that is in story form is written for our admonition so that we can learn from it. Here it is right in Numbers 23:9, "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; lo the people shall dwell **ALONE**, and shall **NOT BE RECKONED AMONG THE NATIONS.**" There it is. God looking down from the top of the rocks, not in some valley looking for their bad points and condemning them. God seeing them the way He wanted to see them --- from the height of love and mercy. They dwelt **ALONE** and they weren't organized. They didn't have a king. They had a prophet, and the prophet had God in him by the Spirit; and the Word came to the prophet and the Word went to the people. They didn't belong to the U.N.. They didn't belong to the World Council of Churches, to the Baptists, Presbyterians, Assembly of God or any other group. They didn't need to belong. They were joined to God. They didn't need counsel from any council --- they had "Thus saith the Lord" in their midst. Hallelujah!

Now in spite of the fact that Balaam knew the proper approach to God and could bring forth a revelation from the Lord by means of a special endowment of power, he was still, for all of that, a bishop in the false group. For what did he do now in order to win favor with Balak? He formulated a plan wherein God would be forced to deal with Israel in death. Just as Satan knew that he could beguile Eve (cause her to fall in fleshly sin) thus causing God to pass His pronounced sentence of death against sin, so Balaam knew that if he could get Israel to sin, God would have to deal with them in death. So he planned a way to get them to come over and join in sin. He sent out invitations to come to the feast of Baal-peor (come over and worship with us). Now Israel, no doubt, had seen the feasts of the Egyptians so they did not feel it was too wrong to go and just look on and perhaps eat with the people. (What is wrong with fellowship any way? We are supposed to love them, aren't we, or how can we win them?) Being friendly never hurt anyone -- - or so they thought. But when those sexy Moabitish women began to dance and undress while they whirled around, doing their rock and roll and twist, the lust rose up in the Israelites and they were drawn into adultery, and God in wrath slew forty-two thousand of them.

And that is what Constantine and his successors did at Nicaea and after Nicaea. They invited the people of God to the convention. And when the church sat down to eat, and rose up to play (partaking of church form, ceremonies, and pagan feasts named after Christian rites), she was trapped; she had committed fornication. And God walked out.

When any man turns from the Word of God and joins a church instead of receiving the Holy Spirit, that man dies. Dead! That is what he is. Don't join a church. Don't get into organization and get taken up with creeds and tradition or anything that takes the place of the Word and the Spirit, or you're dead. It's all over. You're dead. Eternally separated from God!

That is what has happened in every age since. God delivers the people. They come out by the blood, sanctified by the Word, walk through the waters of baptism and get filled with the Spirit; but after awhile the first love cools off and someone gets the idea that they ought to organize in order to preserve themselves and make a name for themselves, and they organize themselves right back in the second generation and sometimes even before then. They no longer have the Spirit of God, just a form of worship. They are dead. They have hybridized themselves with creed and form and there is no life in them.

So Balaam got Israel to commit fornication. Do you know that physical fornication is the very same spirit that lies in organized religion? I said that the spirit of fornication is the spirit of organization. And all fornicators will have their place in the lake of fire. That is what God thinks of organization. Yes sir, the whore and her daughters will be in the lake of fire.

Denominations are not of God. They never have been and never will be. It's a wrong spirit that separates the people of God into hierarchy and laity; and it's, therefore, a wrong spirit that separates the people from the people. That's what organization and denominations do. In organizing they separate themselves from the Word of God, and bring themselves into spiritual adultery.

Now notice that Constantine gave special feasts unto the people. They were the old pagan feasts with new names taken from the church, or in some cases Christian rites were taken and abused with pagan ceremonies. He took the worship of the sun-god and changed it to the Son of God. Instead of celebrating on December 21, which is when they used to celebrate the feast to the sun-god, they put it up to December 25th and called it the Son of God's birthday. But we know that He was born in April when life comes forth, not in December. And they took the feast to Astarte and called it the Easter celebration wherein the Christian is supposed to celebrate the death and resurrection of the Lord. Actually it was a pagan feast to Astarte.

They placed altars in the church. They put in images. They gave the people what they called the apostles' creed, though you can't find it in the Bible. They taught the people ancestor worship thereby making the Rou spiritistic church in the world. Every foul bird was in that cage. And you have the Protestants with their organizations doing the same thing.

They ate things sacrificed to idols. Now I don't say that this really means they were literally eating meats sacrificed to idols. For though the council of Jerusalem had spoken against such, Paul did not make much of it as he said the idols were nothing. It was just a matter of conscience except where it offended a weaker brother and then it was not allowed. Furthermore, this Revelation has to do with Gentiles and not Jews as these are Gentile Churches. I see this in the same light I see the words of the Lord, "Except ye eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." You can see that eating is actually partaking in a spiritual sense. So when these people were bowing to the images, lighting candles, using pagan holidays, confessing their sins to men (all of which belongs to the devil's religion,) they were partakers with the devil and not of the Lord. They were in idolatry whether they admitted it or not. They can talk all they want that the altars and the incense are only to remind them of the prayers of the Lord or whatever they think it means; and they can say that when they pray before the image it is just for the sake of emphasis; and that when they confess to the priest, it is really to God they are doing it in their hearts, and when they say the priest forgives them, it is just that he is doing it in the Name of the Lord; they can say what they want but they are partaking in the well known Babylonian, Satanic religion and have joined themselves to idols and committed spiritual fornication, which means death. They are dead.

So the church and the state were married. The church joined up with idols. With the power of the state behind them they felt that now, "The kingdom had come and God's will had been enforced upon the earth." No wonder the Roman Catholic Church is not looking for the return of the Lord Jesus. They are not millennialists. They have their millennium right here. "The pope is reigning right now and God is reigning in him." So when He comes according to them, it has to be when the new heavens and the earth are prepared. But they are wrong. That pope is the head of the false church, and there is going to be a millennium, but while that is going on he won't be in it. He will be somewhere else.

The Warning

Revelation 2:16, "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

What else can He say? Can God overlook the sin of those who have borne His Name in vain? There is only one way to receive grace in the hour of sin, REPENT. Confess you are wrong. Come to God for forgiveness and for the Spirit of God. This is a command from God. To disobey is death, for He says, "I will make war with you with the sword in My mouth." The beast made war with the saints, but God will make war with the beast. Those who fought the Word will one day find the Word fighting them. It is a serious thing to take from, or add to the Word of God. For those who changed it, and did with it as it suited them, what will their end be but death and destruction? But still the grace of God cries out, "Repent." Oh, how sweet are the thoughts of repentance. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. I bring my sorrow. I repent that I am what I am, and what I have done. Now it is the blood, nothing but the blood of Jesus. What will it be? Repentance, or the sword of death? It's up to you.

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