

“Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts!”

The old adage, "Never look a gift horse in the mouth," meaning to always accept what is given to you without being critical... well, that is very bad advice—a better adage would be "Beware Greeks bearing gifts!"

According to the Homer's *Illiad*, the Greeks besieged the city of Troy for ten years without success, until the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, came up with a plan to get the Greek army into Troy.

Odysseus built an immense wooden horse. He had his warriors hide inside it. After leaving the horse at the gates of Troy, the Greek army sailed away. The Trojans thinking the Greeks had given up and had left the horse as a gift, brought it inside the gates.

That night, while the Trojans were sleeping, the Greek ships quietly returned. The soldiers in the horse slipped out of their wooden horse and opened the city gates. The Greek army quietly entered Troy and started fires all over the city. The Trojans awoke to find their city in flames. As they tried to flee, they were killed by the waiting Greeks.

The story of the Trojan Horse and the fall of Troy have come to represent the subversion of anything from within. That is what was happening to the church at Pergamos in Revelation 2:12-17.

Whereas Satan was trying to crush the Smyrnan church by persecution from without, he was trying to collapse the Pergamos congregation through corruption from within.

We need to take heed to the fact that what ten years of outward assault on Troy was unable to accomplish was done in one night when the enemy was brought within the city.

The Trojan Horse at Pergamos was what Jesus called the doctrine of Balaam. It became a stumbling block to the believers, leading them to accept idolatry and immorality while trying to maintain their distinctiveness as Christians.

Warning: As we see from Scripture, the danger of the doctrine of Balaam is that it tries to wed the people of God to the ways of the world, and that is something that has never worked and will never work. God's people are to be a peculiar people. God's people are to be a distinct people. God's people are to be a separate people. Friendship with the world is not an option. We are not to worship at its altars. We are not to learn its ways. We must not be pressed into its mold. Yet, that is what was happening in the church at Pergamos, and it continues to

happen in churches today. The doctrine of Balaam is still finding its way into modern congregations, opening the way for worldliness to destroy the people of God.

Location: “where thou dwellest.” Pergamos was primarily known for one thing: religion. On a hillside overlooking the city was the giant altar of Zeus a throne of stone rising 40 feet into the air. On every corner, instead of finding a church, you would find a temple or altar to a pagan God. It was a primary center for the worship of the Emperors. Religions of all kinds thrived in Pergamos. In fact, there is an ancient saying that whenever any kooky religious idea was expelled from some part of the world, it would find a place in Pergamos.

Ancient religions were usually associated with immorality: prostitution, sodomy, orgies, and lewd entertainment. Thus, Pergamos was not only a religious city. It was a wicked city, and, according to Jesus, it was the capital of Satan's kingdom. It was the location of his seat, or throne. It was the place he dwelleth—the place he called home. But God had a light in the heart of Satan's kingdom. And to that congregation, he said, I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.

- a. He knew what opportunities they had.
- b. He knew what obstacles they had to overcome the culture, the false religions.
- c. He knew the kind of opposition they faced.

He wanted the church at Pergamos to have the assurance that He knew where they were and what they were up against.

Loyalty: They were firm in their devotion: “holdest fast my Name.”

- a. In their personal lives and in their public ministry, the Name of Jesus was lifted high.
- b. Everything they did was identified with Jesus Christ.
- c. They maintained sound doctrine: “hast not denied my faith.” This was a church that clung to the fundamentals of the faith and would not compromise one precious doctrine of the Word of God, even when public opposition and Satanic oppression joined together to bring about the martyrdom of one of their faithful members.

What we see in Pergamos is a church that was unashamed of their faith and unwavering in their doctrine. If you had attended one of their services, you would have sung songs of praise and worship, heard genuine prayer that sprung from the heart, and heard teaching that was doctrinally sound. They were preaching the Gospel and worshipping Jesus, but they were in need of repentance because they had compromised with the world.

Lack: They were infested with the doctrine of Balaam. The Trojan Horse of Moab, in the OT, was their daughters. They came into the camp of the Israelites and caught the eyes of their men. They invited them to their sacrifices feasts full of immorality and idolatry. Soon, the men are eating at the tables of false gods, sleeping in the beds of pagan women, and bowing

themselves down to worthless idols. And this selfsame spirit of worldly acceptance was alive and deadly in Pergamos!

How did it happen?

The counsel of Balaam: He taught Balak (the King of Moab) to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel. He counseled Balak to send his women to seduce the men of Israel to make marriages with them and blend with them.

It was a teaching that attacked the separation and sanctification that God expects His people to maintain. That is the doctrine of Balaam. It is the teaching that God's people can mix with the world while maintaining their Christian distinctiveness and it is widespread in many oneness churches today. They are being taught that they can take the music, fads and fashion of the world and mix it with Bible truths and that will make it Christian.

That is the doctrine of Balaam. It attempts to wed the people of God to the ways of the world, and God calls it whoredom and fornication, an unholy alliance. And just as Moab corrupted Israel, so the world is corrupting many local assemblies. Our churches are full of people who hold the values of the world, find their pleasure in the world, and take their priorities from the world.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes: Neither the identity nor the teaching of the Nicolaitanes has been preserved for us today. Although the word itself means to *conquer the people*, the Bible doesn't tell us what the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was. All we know for sure is that God hated it. However, I think there may be a reason why God has left the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes a mystery: as a reminder to us that many false doctrines can creep into the church, doctrines hated and despised by God. We must guard against every false doctrine and prove every teaching by a clear and correct interpretation of the Word of God.

How can the condition be healed?

Repentance: God told this church to repent to change its mind about its worldly ways or to face the discipline of God. Since at the heart of their error was false doctrine, God points them to the sharp two-edged sword of His mouth the Word of God. That is the only way to correct error, is through the teaching and preaching of a rightly divided Scripture. If they repented, he promised them two things:

- a. If they quit eating at the table of the world things sacrificed to idols they would be fed with hidden manna. God would satisfy them in ways that the world could not.
- b. If they broke off their relationship with the world, God would give them a white stone engraved with a new name. In that day, special stones were given to people that entitled them

to special privileges of friendship. By showing the stone, they could expect to be received and be given friendship and hospitality.

Reminder: What this tells us is that the person who rejects the friendship of the world will enjoy the unique friendship of God. What Pergamos teaches us is that we can boldly call ourselves Christians and hold to the fundamentals of the faith, the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the Virgin birth, etc., and lose the blessings and friendship of God by refusing to maintain our separation from the world and its ways.

Be careful of the horses you let in the gates.....

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