

“The Seven Church Harvest” #3

Pentecost – 2000: Pergamos (1)

Fred R. Coulter – May 13, 2000

The reason I'm calling this series *The Seven Church Harvest* is because for Pentecost there are seven weeks plus the 50th day. We'll also cover the 50th day, because there is even a harvest on that day, and that is the harvest outside of the Church age. Right now we're living in the Church age and Rev. 2 & 3 contains:

- the seven churches which were there; literally seven churches
- a prophetic history of God's Church down through history and it also shows the attitude of any individual Christian or individual congregations of Christians at any one time as you go down through history.
- the possibility that at the end we also have as God views things, by attitude and works and things like this, that there will be seven churches

It's very interesting how you have the parallel there.

- the Church began on Pentecost
- you have seven churches down through history
- that all leads up to the return of Jesus Christ

Church at Pergamos

This time we're going to begin with the Church at Pergamos. Things really get into a very difficult way with the Church.

Revelation 2:12: "And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos..."

Angel can mean *messenger*. I cannot picture an angel having the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, nor can I picture an angel of God eating things sacrificed to idols. This has to mean *the messenger*.

"...write: 'These things says He Who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know your works and where you dwell, where the throne of Satan *is*; but you are holding fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you because you have there *those* who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. Moreover, you also have *those* who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent! For if *you* do not *repent*, I will come to you quickly, and will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give *the right* to eat of the hidden manna; and I will give him a

white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except the one who receives it" (vs 12-17).

Let's begin analyzing these things. First of all, the Church in Pergamos had a pagan history going way back, reaching clear back into the time of the Babylonian 'mystery religious' system. Alexander Hislop, in the book *The Two Babylons*, has this to say concerning the Church in Pergamos: In Pergamos there was the sovereign pontiff of the pagan religion. We are going to see that the king of Pergamos willed everything in Pergamos—everything concerning the 'religious' rites, the land, the city, the whole thing—to the Roman Empire.

The Two Babylons by Alexander Hislop, pp 240-241:

Still the sovereign pontiff of Rome, even after the Etruscan idolatry was absorbed into the Roman system, was only an offshoot from the grand original Babylonian system. He was a devoted worshipper of the Babylonian god; but he was not the legitimate representative of that God. The true legitimate Babylonian Pontiff had his seat beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire. That seat, after the death of Belshazzar, and the expulsion of the Chaldean priesthood from Babylon by the Medo-Persian kings, was at Pergamos, where afterwards was one of the seven churches of Asia. There, in consequence, for many centuries was "Satan's seat" (Rev. ii. 13)." That is the seat of religious authority. "There, under favour of the deified kings of Pergamos, was his favourite abode, there was the worship of Aesculapius, under the form of the serpent, celebrated with frantic orgies and excesses, that elsewhere were kept under some measure of restraint. At first, the Roman Pontiff had no immediate connection with Pergamos and the hierarchy there...

We're also going to see that the hierarchy is involved here.

...Yet, in course of time, the Pontificate of Rome and the Pontificate of Pergamos came to be identified. Pergamos itself became part and parcel of the Roman Empire, when Attalus III., the last of its kings, at his death, left by will all his dominions to the Roman people, B.C. 133. For some time after the kingdom of Pergamos was merged in the Roman dominions, there was no one who could set himself openly and advisedly to lay claim to all the dignity inherent in the old title of the kings of Pergamos. The original powers even of the Roman Pontiffs seem to have been by that time abridged, but when Julius Caesar, who had previously been elected Pontifex Maximus, became also, as Emperor, the supreme civil ruler of the Romans, then, as head of the Roman state, and head of the Roman religion, all the powers and functions of the *true legitimate Babylonian Pontiff* were supremely vested in him...

That's important because with the shift coming over, the ones who were the true Christians in Pergamos undoubtedly left and what remained was the beginning of the Catholic Church. This shows how the whole thing transited from one to the other.

Then he seems to have laid claim to the divine dignity of Attalus, as well as the kingdom that Attalus had bequeathed to the Romans, as centering in himself...

This shows then how Pergamos came to be identified with Rome. And there are some very important things concerning that. Pergamos was the throne of Satan the devil.

Verse 12, Christ says:

"...'These things says He Who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"

That is the Word of God; a sharp sword with two edges. He's going to fight against them with His Word.

In Hebrews 4 we find that God's Word is likened unto a sharp two-edged sword. This is what we were talking about because all of God's Word proceeds from God, for out of the mouth of God, and Christ is saying here that with the sharp sword that is coming out of His mouth. He is going to judge them by His Word. He's going to come after them according to His power.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, *and* of both *the* joints and *the* marrow, and *is* able to discern... [judge] ... *the* thoughts and intents of *the* heart. And there is not a created thing that is not manifest in His sight; but all things *are* naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account" (vs 12-13).

In other words there is nothing, nothing whatsoever that God does not see or know or understand.

Those people who think that they can fool God or somehow do things that God says you shouldn't do, all they're doing is stacking up the two-edged sword against themselves and God's judgment will come upon them. The only thing is that a lot of people do not understand is that God will let wickedness prosper *for a while* to give them a space of repentance whether they will turn back to God or not. So here, God is forewarning them right at the beginning in Pergamos, that He is going to judge them with His sharp two-edged sword.

In Rev. 19 we find that when Christ returns He is going to use His sharp sword again, not only His power of plagues as He has, but He's also going to use the sword with which He's going to smite the nations.

Revelation 19:11: "And I saw heaven open; and behold, a white horse; and He Who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He does judge and make war. And His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns; *and* He had a name written that no one knows except Him" (vs 11-12).

See how the *eyes of the flame of fire* ties right back to Rev. 1. What we find in the book of Revelation where Christ said He's 'the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last,' many of these things going back and forth in the book of Revelation and tying it all together.

What we need to understand is that the book of Revelation is such that you have a good grasp of the rest of the Bible in order to begin to put all the things in Revelation together and to understand what's going on.

Do a study and go through and write the Ten Commandments as you go through, and then study the book of Revelation and see how many of these Ten Commandments are contained in there. We know that the Church of God keeps the Sabbath so it doesn't have to relate to the Sabbath directly there, but it says 'in keeping the commandments,' and here are those who have the faith of Jesus Christ and keep His commandments.

Verse 13: "And *He* was clothed with a garment dipped in blood; and His name is The Word of God. And the armies in heaven were following Him on white horses; *and* they were clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He might smite the nations; and He shall shepherd them with an iron rod" (vs 13-15).

Notice how that goes right back to several things there even in Rev. 2 where it talks about Thyatira ruling with a rod of iron.

"...and He treads the winepress of the fury and the wrath of the Almighty God. And on *His* garment and on His thigh He has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords" (vs 15-16).

We're going to see that's why God has to come and fight against those in Pergamos. Because not only do they have a hierarchy but then they change the nature of the worship of God and the commandments of God, which are the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Those deeds relate right down into today's 'religion' of Catholicism and Protestantism, and all into all of the pagan religions.

Let's continue on with Pergamos and all the things that are there. It's just like anything else. We live in a society that is so wrapped up in evil, and in this case where Satan's seat is. What is the old saying? *When in Rome do as the Romans do*. You become affected by it; you see the pagan religion there with all of its hierarchy, all of the organization that's going on.

I remember watching a television program about so called St. Ignatius and how he helped organize things leading up to the Catholic Church. The thing that he did more than anything else was, he got all of the churches out of the homes—because that's where they were meeting—and got them into an organized hierarchy. This is very similar to what we're confronted with here.

Revelation 2:13 "I know your works and where you dwell, where the throne of Satan is; but you are holding fast My name, and did not deny My faith..."

That was for only a while. This is the only good thing that Christ has to say about the Church at Pergamos and that was only temporary.

"...even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (v 13).

Not only is his seat, but that's where he dwells. Antipas can also be equated to anti-pope or against the pope. Now you see how that ties in with the supreme pontiff in Pergamos as Alexander Hislop brought out in *The Two Babylons*.

Let's talk about the things concerning Balaam now. Balaam becomes very important because Balaam's philosophy was to *bring them all together in the same worship*. If you can do that then 'you can bring God's curse upon them because I cannot curse, myself.' Balaam could not curse so he told Balak that if you seduce them with the women and idolatry then God will have to judge them. We'll see, sure enough, that's what God had to do. It was quite a thing that was done!

Verse 14: "But I have a few things against you because you have there *those* who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication."

If you want to read the whole account of Balaam you can do that. Num. 22-24. We're going to see the result of that counsel. This has quite a few implications because it also has to do with combining the 'religious' practices.

Deut. 12 becomes profoundly important because He already told them this several times,

Deuteronomy 12:28: "Be careful to observe and obey all these words which I command you, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever when you do *that which is* good and right in the sight of the LORD your God."

We're also going to see that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans impacts upon this as well.

Verse 29: "When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you go to possess them, and you take their place and dwell in their land."

That's what they were doing, coming in ready to take over the land and the children of Moab were right there.

Verse 30: "Take heed to yourself that you do not become ensnared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise?'"

What we're dealing with, with the doctrine of Balaam, is ecumenism, bringing all religions together.

Verse 31: "You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination to the LORD, which He hates, they have done to their gods; even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. Whatsoever thing that I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it" (vs 31-32).

Balaam instructed Balak, 'Now look, you get your religious leaders up here, and you get the women up here, and you will be able to seduce Israel. I can't curse them but God will have to punish them, which will be better than my curse.' So, let's see what happened.

Numbers 25:1: "And Israel dwelt in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods...." (vs 1-2).

How important is it not to get involved with other religions? *Very important!*

Verse 3: "...And the people ate and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal Peor..." (vs 2-3).

You go right into Baal worship. Baalism is the same as Baal worship though the names don't mean the same thing. It was at Peor that this took place. Baal is the Nimrod, the sun-god.

"...And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel....

[Was the anger of the LORD kindled against Pergamos? *Yes!* He warned them!]

And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people and impale them before the LORD facing the sun..." (vs 3-4).

In other words, in executing them go ahead and cut off their heads and hang them up.

"...so that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.' And Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal Peor'" (vs 4-5).

This ought to tell us that God does not want Sunday-worship.

Verse 6: "And behold, a man of the children of Israel came and brought to his brethren a woman of Midian, in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel..."

—even while the correction was going on. I mean, you talk about gall and audacity!

"...who *were* weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose up from among the congregation and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman, through her belly...." (vs 6-8).

Probably caught them right in the act and just did them in.

"...So, the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand" (vs 8-9).

I want you to notice the parallel between Phinehas (Num. 25) and Antipas (Rev. 2). Antipas was a man who

- stood for the Word of God
- stood for the faith of Christ

- resisted all of this ecumenizing of bringing religions together
- kept the faith of Christ, but he was slain for it.

Now the parallel ends, because Phinehas was given a perpetual blessing, however it makes you wonder: could it be that Antipas was one of the descendants of Phinehas.

Verse 10: "And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel in that he was zealous for My sake among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore, say, "Behold, I give him My covenant'" (vs. 10-12).

Note sermon series: *Covenants of God*—going through all the covenants in the Bible. There is more than just what is called the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Here we find a special covenant given to Phinehas, the son of Eleazar:

Verse 13: "And he shall have it, and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood..."

—meaning that he will always have someone standing before God to serve God.

"...because he was zealous for his God and made an atonement for the children of Israel.' And the name of the Israelite who was killed, he who was struck with the woman of Midian, *was* Zimri, the son of Salu, leader of a chief house of the Simeonites. And the Midianite woman's name who was killed *was* Cozbi, the daughter of Zur. He was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian" (vs 13-15).

The way that you come in to seduce a nation is you get the leaders together and then it filters down to the people. That's the way it always has been. That's the way it's going today. That's why all these nations get together, make these agreements, have the trade agreements and so forth.

Suffice to say that when the children of Israel did conquer the land, they did go into Moab and they took and killed Balaam, and they killed all the males, even the young ones. Moses was angry at them because they didn't slay all of them, so he let them have a concession of having the small young girls who had never known a man, that they could keep them as handmaids. That was it. But it's very interesting here in Micah 6 we find that Balaam, the son of Beor, is also mentioned in relationship to coming before God. So we get the story flow how that relates to Balaam the son of Beor:

Micah 5:11: "And I will cut off the cities of your land, and throw down all your strongholds."

I want you to know how closely that this follows the prophecy in Rev. 2 where God said He was going to come against them with a sharp two-edged sword, and that he would fight against them. Here's a lesson concerning the children of Israel in the same thing.

Verse 12: "And I will cut off witchcrafts out of your hand, and there shall not be fortune-tellers among you. I will also cut off your graven images, and your sacred pillars out of the midst of you; and you shall never again worship the work of your hands. And I will pluck your groves out of the midst of you; thus I will destroy your cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have never heard" (vs. 12-15).

Micah 6:1: "Hear now what the LORD says, 'Arise, contend with the mountains and let the hills hear your voice. O mountains, hear the LORD'S controversy; and you, strong foundations of the earth, for the LORD has a controversy with His people, and He will plead His case with Israel'" (vs 1-2).

What is that controversy? *That controversy is related to Balaam the son of Beor!*

Verse 3: "O My people, what have I done to you?...."

We'll see how this parallels also the Church of Pergamos. What did God do to you?

"...And in what way have I made you weary? Testify against Me! For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of slaves; and I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you. O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab planned, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may know the righteousness of the LORD' (vs 3-5).

In other words all these things at the end of Micah 5 relate to what Balaam counseled Balak to do in order to seduce the children of Israel.

Verse 6: "With what shall I come before the LORD, *to* bow myself before God the Most High?...."

We're going to learn that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans coupled with Balaam, and eating things sacrificed to idols is a religious doctrine on how to approach God. So, this fits in tremendously with it. How do you come before God?

"...Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my life?...."

[All of those revert back to the pagan practices.]

...He has shown you, O man, what *is* good. And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" (vs 6-8).

We find in Rev, 2 that they committed fornication. But this not only was that, he counseled them to eat things sacrificed to idols. Now eating things sacrificed to idols in today's terminology has been shifted over from animal sacrifice to the Eucharist. What we really have here is the beginning of the Eucharist. All of these things tie in and go back to Babylon the Great.

Now remember Rev. 17, the woman, mother of harlots, 'Mystery Babylon.' She has in her hand a golden censor, cup and everyone is drinking out of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. This ties right in with it. What is one of the first things that they began doing?

Let's stop and think how we saw the Church of God change, that is the Worldwide Church of God. First of all they changed the nature of God. Then they began bringing in Easter, downgrading the Passover; they began bringing in having communion, which is the first step away from Passover going toward the Eucharist. And then they said, 'Well why don't we celebrate it quarterly like the Seventh Day Adventists do.' So, they got that in. Then they said, 'Why don't we do it weekly like the Protestants do?' The final step is: 'Why don't we have the Eucharist like the Catholics do?' That's where it's all going to end up and then you are truly eating something sacrificed to an idol because the Eucharist's little wafers are contained in a little box on the altar that is called the tabernacle. The wafers are called 'the host.' Above it is a statue of Mary, and all of their prayers have to do with idolatry; even this little wafer is idolatry.

The final thing with the Eucharist is this: You have what is called *transubstantiation*, which means that the priest who asks the blessing on the wafer—which is round symbolizing the sun-god—has the power to command God to come down and put His presence directly into the bread so that the bread—when the participants eat it—is called the 'actual body and blood of Christ.' That's what this is leading to. We find that over in Thyatira, too; how this thing has developed even more.

Remember, the fornication is not just physical fornication alone, but it is spiritual fornication. Wherever you have the Roman Gnostic system—as brought out in this book by Alan Knight—we have that we also have the sin of literal fornication. Now, just stop and think about it. Forty percent of the Catholic priests have AIDS—HIV. They didn't get it drinking coffee at a coffeehouse. Enough said.

Let's look at the Nicolaitans; there are two things we need to understand.

- there is the hierarchy
- they're corrupting the Truth

Let's first of all look at where Jesus warned the disciples about the corruption of the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees.

A comment was made that the wafer has stamped in it IHS, which Catholics claim is for 'in His service.' Now that is esoteric knowledge so everyone will think it's a good thing. But those initials really go back to Nimrod, Horus and Semiramis; Isis, Horus, and Semiramis. That's where it goes back to. God will let them bring their blatant paganism right out into the open. Yes, IHS is on every Catholic grave, too. Amazing, isn't it?

Matthew 16:6: "And Jesus said to them, 'Watch out, and be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"

What had the Jews done? All of them? *They made traditions after traditions, after traditions*, rejecting the Word of God so that they would follow those. We have a very good lesson here when we come back to the Nicolaitans and how they corrupt the Word of God. We will see there were other forces involved which also came from Judaism and Simon Magusism that came together to form the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. And you're going to be absolutely amazed what that is.

Verse 7: "Then they reasoned among themselves, saying, '*It is* because we did not take bread.' But when Jesus knew *this*, He said to them, 'O *you* of little faith, why are you reasoning among yourselves that *it is* because you did not bring bread? Do you still not understand? *Do you* not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? How is it that you do not understand that I was not speaking of bread *when I told* you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?' Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (vs 7-12).

That is their teaching.

What we are dealing with is the Jewish religion at that time, which also had brought in many of the pagan concepts into what they were doing; even in the sacrifices at the temple that they were performing. There's a great lesson for us here. When you go back and you understand what has happened, it's really quite a thing.

The first thing the Nicolaitans are noted for is hierarchy. Let's look at an article: *The Nicolaitans* by J.H. Allen, author of *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*. {transcriber's note: both can be found a websites listed at the end of this message} That's the one that Herbert Armstrong followed for writing his book *United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*.

We won't refer to it very much in the sermon but you can have it so you can read it. There will be a couple things that we will cover here a little bit later. First of all, let's understand that 'Nicolas' means, *to conquer* or *the conqueror*. 'Laos' means, *people*. Hence you get the word Nicolaitans, which means *the conquering or the overlording of the laity*. One of the sins of the Nicolaitans, one of their deeds, is making a great separation between the ministry and the brethren, so the establishing of the hierarchy.

Let's just read one paragraph, and see how this came into the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church starts right out in *My Catholic Faith* by Louis LaRavoire, which is that the Roman Catholic Church with its hierarchy is the only Church of God on earth; that outside of the hierarchy you have no salvation.

from the article: *The Nicolaitans*, quoting from the *Century Dictionary*.

If anyone shall say that there is not in the Catholic Church a hierarchy established by the divine ordination, consisting of bishops, presbyters and ministers, let him be anathema, Council of Trent (trans) XXII 6.

The Council of Trent was specifically set up for the counter reformation against the Protestants.

Let's see how that is directly against what Jesus said. That's why in the things that we do, if you've heard me say over and over again, which I will say again. We will not have a hierarchy in the Christian Biblical Church of God. We will have elders and overseers. We will have teachers and helps but *we will not have a hierarchy*. The brethren are not to be cut off from the elders, the ministers. They are not to be lorded over by them, and Christ made this very plain to the ones who became the apostles. Remember, the Church at Ephesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, so they knew to fight against the hierarchy, and the doctrine of corrupting the Word of God.

Matthew 20:25: "But Jesus called them..."

That's after they had the dispute about the mother of John and James asking for the right and left hand beside Christ. Of course it made all the rest of them angry, so Christ had to settle an argument among the apostles.

"...'You know that the rulers of the nation's exercise lordship over them, and the great ones **exercise authority** over them'" (v 25):

- exercise lordship—the Greek word 'katakuriuo'—which means to *exercise dominion downward*. That's why it says *over them*.
- authority—the Greek 'katexousiazō'—*authority downward*
- princes (KJV)—civil rulers
- great ones—religious rulers

Did we not read that in part two of this series about Simon Magus? Was he not a religious ruler? Let's go back and just review that for a minute, because this becomes very important because this will help lead in to the other doctrines of the Nicolaitans. We will see that the very doctrines of the Nicolaitans and the teachings that came from the Gnostics exist today. This is part of what we have been fighting when we have been seeing the deterioration of the Church of God.

Acts 8:9, "But *there was* a certain man named Simon, who had from earlier times been practicing sorcery in the city..."

Did we not read how God condemned that (Micah 5)? *Witchcraft and sorcery, and things sacrificed to idols, and Baal worship!*

"...and astounding the nation..."

[he had them hypnotized, mass hypnotism, deceived]

...of Samaria, proclaiming himself to be some great one" (v 9).

This came out from him. That's very important because we're going to see that the Nicolaitans talk about the doctrines of sanctity within, and how that connects with angels and with the problems that entered into the New Testament Church.

Verse 10: "To him they had all given heed..."

Why did they give heed? Because he exercised 'katexousiazō'—*authority downward*. Let's look at it this way: Since he gave himself out as some great one, was he not above all the people? *Yes!* If they all gave heed to him, was he not over them and lording it down upon them with these means? *No doubt about it!*

Verse 10: "To him they had all given heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.'....

[that's quite a title]

... Now, they were giving heed to him because *he* had for a long time bewitched them with sorceries" (vs 10-11).

Now you know why Peter so roundly rebuked him.

Matthew 20:26, Christ said:

"However, it shall not be this way among you..."

[I wonder how many years those Scriptures were avoided?]

... but whoever would become great among you, let him be your servant [minister].

That's what minister means, *a servant*.

Let's come here to 1-Peter 5. I know we've covered this somewhat in the past. I think we did when we covered with Simon Magus, but let's go ahead and read it into the record so we have it all here together.

Now 1 Peter 5:1: "*The elders who are among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder...*"

This helps us understand that even though Peter was an apostle, he considered himself an elder.

"...and an *eyewitness* of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed" (v 1).

He went with James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration and saw Jesus in His glorified form.

Verse 2: "Feed the flock of God..."

That's what it's to be. It's not to be an office over. It is not to be one of glory, self-serving, dictatorial things at all.

"...*that is* among you, exercising oversight..." (v 2).

There is a difference between oversight and overlording. Oversight is that you oversee that everything is done properly and in order. Overlord is you make everyone come under you and force them to do your will. There's a vast difference.

"...not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but *with an eager attitude*; not as exercising lordship over *your* possessions; but *by* being examples to the flock of God" (vs. 2-3).

The thing that anyone who is an elder has to remember: *all the brethren belong to God!* They are the flock of God. They are His. And as stewards we are to take care of the flock of God as we take care of another person's property. That's what a steward is. It is also called in today's language a fiduciary relationship. Which means that you look out for the best interests of the one that you are working for, such as in the case of a real estate broker in helping someone buy or sell a house. You have a fiduciary relationship with that person that you have to give the utmost of honesty, integrity, service, knowledge, disclosure and everything like that.

So likewise, it is with the elders and those who oversee; it is a fiduciary responsibility because you are responsible for those whom God has called. No man calls anyone else to Christ. Christ alone can call. Men have to make the Word of God available through preaching or writing or media or whatever means.

Notice the exaltation for those who are the elders at the resurrection,

v 4. "And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall receive an unfading, *eternal* crown of glory."

We're not to look for rewards in this life: status, power, and especially getting into the things concerning politics and super-exaltation and things like this. *No! No way!* That's part of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans contained right in the name. The name names them for what they are: lords over the laity.

Now let's look at some other things concerning the deeds of the Nicolaitans. It doesn't say the deed but *the deeds*.

Someone gave me this book, *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* by Alan Knight. I put it away and I didn't start reading it till I started on the plane trip coming back from Phoenix. Alan Knight lives in Antioch, California, which is just north of us here. When I was about half way through reading the book I wrote him a letter and sent him the books: *The Christian Passover*, *Lord What Should I Do* and *The Seven General Epistles*. I told him that I thought his book was really quite good. Since I couldn't get his phone number I gave him mine, and he called me. I talked to him the other day on the phone, and I think we can do quite a bit with some of the things that he has here. He used to be in WCG and Ambassador College and he left Ambassador College after 2 years, 1960. He left Worldwide in 1970. But he has written this book, which

is really quite good: *Primitive Christianity in Crisis: The Mystery of Lawlessness Prophecies; Nicolaitan Christianity for Our Time.*

'Primitive' Christianity means that it's the *pure* Christianity as Christ and the apostles taught it. This book shows what happened to it. Let me just summarize the first part of it which is called Hellenism, the Greek religions, all of them. There was a great religious reformation that took place, which moved away from animal sacrifices to the religion of the immortality of the soul, and the inner strength, and the worshipping of gods and angels. One of the things that came out of that were the mystery cults and they had a new spirituality, which then was concentrating from within. And this goes back and comes from the philosophy of Pythagoras and Orpheus, and it was the spiritual development of the inner spirit with the immortality of the human soul and its repeated incarnation in the human body.

At the same time that this was taking place there was also in the east, in Asia, in the 500s and 600's B.C., which ties into the time that the children of Israel were in captivity in Babylon. In history this time is called an Axial Period. Axial means *a profound historical development* that took place universally across the whole face of civilization. Not only did this religious reformation take place in Greece, which then spread to all of the Mediterranean area, because that was all conquered later by Alexander the Great. But also in the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. it went eastward and developed into the religion of Hinduism and Buddhism and that is the same thing that we have today in Hinduism and Buddhism with reincarnation and karma, and the spirits and all of this sort of thing. So, it's really quite a thing how this also was centered around the stars, and then the planets, and the planets were originally called the wandering stars.

Then he brings in Greek philosophy, and brings about the historical development of the new Hellenistic religion. This becomes very important, especially in the series concerning Hebrews because Hebrews was written to the Hellenistic Christians. Hellenism, though it is paganism, did not come out of paganism but it came out of pagan Judaism. This also affected the Jews.

pg 41—Gnostic Christianity in History

What does all this have to do with Christianity? It has everything to do with it because a large part of the Christian movement in the first century combined Hellenistic... [Greek philosophies] ...religion with New Testament Christianity to create a hybrid called Gnostic Christianity....

And that's what all the forces are dealing with when we read in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul.

pg 42—It should be obvious from the start that Gnostic Christianity in general is merely another manifestation of the reformation of Greek religion that began with Orphism and Pythagoreanism....

For Gnostics the world is altogether evil, and so its creator Yahweh and his religion must be absolutely evil as well....

This becomes important because the same philosophy comes down today of rejecting the Old Testament and the laws and commandments of God and is in fact the very heart and core of what I'm teaching against concerning sermon series: *Refuting Sunday-Keeping*, and out of the book: *Sunday Facts, Sabbath Fiction* by Russell Targo.

The Gnostics, however, were Christians. They came into existence in the first century of the Christian era, almost immediately after the death and resurrection of Christ and the founding of the church. The teachings of the Bible about evil, the emphasis on evil as the great problem of mankind, had to be incorporated into the mix....

pg 43—...However, in the Gnostic mainstream, Hebrew religion generally was viewed as totally evil....

That's the whole Old Testament. Sabbath-keeping, Holy Day-keeping, and so forth.

...Gnostics saw themselves as a reformation, not of Judaism but of the New Testament Church, the so called Primitive or 'Jewish' Christianity that prevailed for a time after the founding of the church in the 30s A.D.

Now here it talks about how they believe.

pg 44—The basic reinterpretation of biblical religion under Gnosticism is as follows: The world was not created by the highest deity, the Father...

This will begin to ring a lot of bells as we go through. How many times are we told that Christ was God? You can just start out with the first three verses of Gospel of John. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

...The world was not created by the highest deity, the Father...

So they believed in the Father.

...But by an emanation from the Father. This is the demiurge, generally equated with Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. He is an inferior, deluded and often evil being. His claims to be the supreme God are a wicked delusion, and man must by all means reject him and his religion. For Gnostics, the Old Covenant and the Old Covenant God have to be evil....

They viewed everything materialistically evil. Now this is a little more radical than what it's developed into. Since it's developed and it's come along and evolved where they dropped some of the radicalism of it, this kind of thing of being against materialism is the very foundation for the monastic societies, where you deprive yourself of all physical things. Swear a poverty vow, and so forth, which, by the way, those of Buddhism do. Many in Hinduism do. So you see it's with us today.

...If the material world is evil then its creator equally must be evil. The religion of the Old Covenant is a false religion based on materialistic animal sacrifice. It deceives man into seeking spirituality in the material world, keeping him in bondage to this world.

So now along comes Christianity and ah-ha. Now we have something that agrees with us. The end of animal sacrifices.

By a process of emanations or a fall from a higher state, spirit has become trapped in the material world. The true Father has sent Christ to rescue the spark of spirit that exists in some men, to reveal the knowledge (*gnosis*)...

And today the inheritors of gnosis are the Masons. To reveal the gnosis, or the knowledge. We are to grow in grace and knowledge. You're going to see how all this fits in. It is so clever. It is absolutely just unreal. That's why it's called the mystery of iniquity, or lawlessness.

"...that will rescue these souls from the God of the Old Testament and his material creation, and enable them to enter heaven....

So that's how going to heaven entered into the so-called Christian church.

....So Gnosticism viewed the religion of the New Covenant as a spiritual teaching that liberates man from material existence....

Because what are we to do? We are to not give into the desires of lust of the flesh. When we get done with this what is *the mystery of iniquity?* or *the mystery of lawlessness?* You're going to be surprised.

...It [Gnosticism] is a religion focusing on the heavens, and the inner life of the soul, the divine spark which is from the heavens and which takes us back there after death.

Mormonism today. In Mormonism you were once a spirit in heaven. And Adam and Eve had to sin so they could bring forth children, so that these spirits in heaven could come down and possess a human body so then they could be perfected and go back to heaven. That's Mormonism today. Mormonism is pure Gnosticism.

Some Gnostics especially relied on the writings of Paul, because of his common emphasis on the superiority of the New Testament. However, Gnosticism also relied heavily on the theory of progressive revelation, claiming special, private revelations to support their reinterpretation of New Testament Christianity. Many Gnostic texts claim a special revelation from Christ after the resurrection, which supercedes New Testament scripture.

Now what are those called in the Catholic Church today? *Traditions!* This is something! It talks about a little bit here concerning Simon Magus.

pg 51—Second Century and Later Gnostic Sects

...The Nicolaitans had disappeared by 200 A.D....

That is the radical Nicolaitans.

...and the Simonians by 250 A.D....

That is the ones who followed Simon Magus. Why did they disappear? *Through the evolution of moderacy then they were moderated and evolved into another form.*

...In any event many more Gnostic sects appeared in their place to carry on the tradition. As time progressed, Gnosticism flourished in many new forms as it continued to mix and match ideas from the broad range of Hellenistic religion and New Testament Christianity.

The Gnostic teacher Carpocrates founded his movement in Alexandria, Egypt, in the mid-100's. He taught that the world was created by inferior angels. Jesus was an extraordinary man with a pure soul, but not divine....

Carpocrates taught a libertine Christian ethic and antinomian theology....

The Greek word is *anomian*, which means *against law*.

...To become free from the evil creator God, one must aggressively insult the God of the Old Testament by flagrantly violating His law. According to Carpocrates, there is no fixed standard of morality. It is, after all, he claimed, only a matter of opinion, as witnessed by the multitude of opinions on the subject found throughout the world....

Isn't that exactly what we have in the ecumenical movement today? Your religion is only a matter of opinion, as they view it.

Now here's a quote, pg 52, from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

"We are saved, indeed, by means of faith and love; but all other things, while in their nature indifferent, are reckoned by the opinion of men some good and some evil, but there is nothing evil by nature."

Once again, this does not mean they totally abandoned morality....

This is the key. The *mystery of lawlessness* does not get rid of moral values, but it substitutes its own standards.

...The argument was that nothing is intrinsically good or evil but depends on the situation and especially its relation to the issue of materialism....

...By breaking free from Jewish religion you will enable your mind to reorient itself towards the inner soul and its connection with the heavens and the spirituality that comes from above.

1-John 4 is a direct teaching against the Nicolaitan Gnostics who were bringing it into the Church.

1-John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

This tells us something very important. Wherever you have false prophets you have demonism, *false spirits*. Go back and read the Gospel, how many times did Jesus come into a synagogue and the demons were the ones who recognized Him? But why would the demons be in the synagogue? *Because they want to be brought back to God somehow!* So, many of these teachings of Gnosticism and going to heaven are demonic spirits contriving a way to reconstruct Christianity so that they, through this person, can go back to heaven. That may sound a little weird but that's exactly what has happened. So, you have the *false prophets*, you have the *false spirits*.

Verse 2: "By this *test* you *can* know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in *the flesh* is from God."

That's very important. I spent quite a section in *The Christian Passover* book, chapter 26, explaining: *Nature of God* and *Nature of Man*, and the kind of flesh that Jesus took upon Himself. Anyone who claims that He did not come in the flesh with the same flesh that we have—God indeed did do that—is of the antichrist.

The Gnostics said the world is evil, all physical things are evil, so therefore, flesh is evil. Since flesh is evil, God would not come in the flesh. It's impossible for God to come in the flesh because God would not do that. This is what he's talking about here. Today it's modified a little bit in Gnostic Catholicism, or Catholic Nicolaitanism, which is that they believe that Jesus came in the flesh. However, they have said that we go to heaven.

Verse 3: "And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God...."

If it's not of God, who is it from? *Satan the devil*, because you only have the spirits, which are angels from God or the spirits which are angels from Satan the devil. He has his angels because Rev. 12 says that Satan fought, and his angels fought. So he has angels.

"...And this is the *spirit* of antichrist..." (v 3).

Nicolaitanism is 'antichristism.' What does it do? *It uses the name of Christ!*

"...which you heard *was* to come, and even now it is already in the world" (v 3).

Verse 5. "They are of the world; because of this, they speak of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God; the one who knows God listens to us; the one who is not of God does not listen to us. By this *means* we know the Spirit of the Truth and the spirit of the deception" (vs 5-6).

Now, let me read this concerning the nature of Christ.

pg 77—Gnosticism in the Bible

...As we know, they almost universally call themselves Christians....

that is the Gnostics who had *gnosis*

...Further, there was no single body of Gnostic doctrine, nor even a harmonious community of Gnostic Christianity. They regularly condemned and fought among themselves, at the same time denouncing their external enemies—the Hellenistic mystery cults, Hellenistic philosophy, and Hellenistic Roman Christianity.

The New Testament sometimes refers to them by one of their most common doctrines. This is the docetic teaching that Jesus and the Christ are not the same person. Most but not all Gnostics believed that Christ was a spiritual being who entered into the man Jesus but withdrew just before the crucifixion and it was only Jesus [the man] who died on the cross. This is a natural product of Gnosticism's extreme interpretation of Hellenistic cosmology. If God is perfect and matter is evil, then it is philosophically impossible that God could mix with matter.

What was the first thing that K.J. Stavrinos did? *Changed the nature of God!* What did he say? *God is an emanation, meaning God is in everything that is created!* So, you had Hellenistic Christianity come in, and who was Stavrinos? He was half-Greek, half-Turkish; meaning he was an Esauite. Does that blow your mind or not?

Let's see something concerning this mystery of iniquity. This tells us that the mystery of iniquity will, which was working then and we're reading about it here now, would continue and come down clear to our time.

Paul says, 2-Thessalonians 2:7:

"For the mystery of **lawlessness**..."

—'anomia' where you get anti-nomeanism. That's kind of a difficult word to say so I'll just call it 'anomia,' which is the literal Greek word, meaning *lawlessness*.

Now we're going to read that Jesus gave a prophecy that this very thing would happen. The very thing that I'm telling you about right now, that I'm reading out of this book by Alan Knight, *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*. Remember the Gnostics were Christians, so-called. The Nicolaitans were Christians, so-called. They are called the *mystery of iniquity* or *lawlessness*, but they have a form of morality, which sounds very Biblical and as a matter of fact many times they even use some of the Biblical commandments because they accept them.

But notice what Christ said here. And this is concerning false prophets leading down to Matthew 7:21:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but the one who is doing the will of My Father, Who *is* in heaven"

What was the will of the Father concerning the Sabbath and Holy Days? *Keep them! All the will of God!* You shall not add to, you shall not take from. Meaning you shall not mix together, which is what they did.

Verse 22: "Many..."

Who are the many?

Verse 13: "Enter in through the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it."

That's a majority of people! That's the majority of those who consider themselves Christian in this world. Hence it also includes all of the other religions of the world because they come from the same root: Babylon, Greece, Hellenistic Christianity; Babylon: Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Animism, and the whole thing all come out of Babylon.

Verse 22: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?' And then I will confess to them, 'I never knew you....'" (vs 22-23).

And they claim to be Gnostics—*knowing*. "...I never knew you...."

"...Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness ['anomia']."

You know the Scripture that says, 'And hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments. Anyone who says I know Him ['gnosis'] and keeps not His commandments is a liar, and the Truth is not in him'

With that background let's continue out of the book by Alan Knight:

pgs 106-107—Christ's view of Gnosticism

I think it appropriate to mention here a common fault in the world of Primitive Christianity....

Now that is the true Churches of God.

...Many tend to fixate on pagan customs and symbols in criticizing Nicolaitan Christianity....

That is the idolatry of the Catholics, the idolatry of the Protestants, and so forth, and they have their own.

...This is a valid issue, but the Bible demonstrates repeatedly that God is displeased by mixing his worship with pagan practices. But the Easter bunny, and Santa Claus and Christmas trees really are not the core issue....

In that, he's correct. That's a periphery. That's a start to begin stripping it away from them.

Mixing pagan practices with the worship of the true God, in an atmosphere of anything goes as long as you paint it Christian, is only one example of the spirit of lawlessness. The real, core issue is the underlying theological, *de facto* licensing of disobedience in general, the wave of sin and human misery that comes from it in the form of war, divorce, the entire gamut and daily grind of strife and emotional dysfunction that afflict mankind, and, most

important, the disrespect for God himself and his creation-centered institutions that cuts man off from the true God of the universe.

That's the lawlessness we have today. Look at how the United States is today as a result of Protestantism and Catholicism and bringing in a gnosis that 'I am good enough on myself that I, me, myself alone will determine what is right.' Look at what we have, all done in the name of Christ.

After lawlessness comes Docetism...

which is that Christ descended into the body of a man

...asceticism...

Which then leads to the monasteries and depriving of the flesh.

We see that Gnostic Christians commonly infiltrate the true church....

Does that ring a bell? *Yes!*

This includes antinomian preachers operating inside the primitive church.... Antinomian Christians are depicted as hounding and slandering God's people with their false claims to be more spiritually advanced and the only true Christians accepted by God....

Which is precisely what they say today concerning Sabbath, exactly the same thing.

On page 117, I think is really a profound one. He goes through showing the forms of spirituality, and going through the different religions. This is a direct going after ecumenism.

pg 117—Does that mean all religions are a valid approach to God?

This is currently what is done in ecumenism. So, Nicolaitanism is also ecumenism—isn't it? Even the Catholics are now saying that there are many roads to God. Some are in Hinduism, some are in Buddhism, some are in Protestantism, and so forth, but we're all going to heaven. And even the Jews believe that. I saw a rabbi on Larry King Live say, 'Well, yes we're all going to heaven. That's that fierce looking rabbi with the black beard and the deep-set eyes.

Alan Knight says, 'I think not.' Here's something profound that he wrote:

...The religions of the world essentially are embodiments of natural human spirituality...

And I will add to it: coupled with demonic spirituality. Because wherever false prophets are there are false spirits.

...all shaped by historical and cultural processes into unique individual forms, incorporating much truth along with a large assortment of error. As sponsors of

natural human spirituality they frequently guide their followers into genuinely godly conduct. They often do a great deal of good.

That is why it is the spirit of lawlessness, and why God hates it.

pg 128—The theological foundation of Gnostic libertinism is strikingly analogous to what survives in modern Nicolaitan Christianity. This is the teaching that moral conduct and law in general are commonly divorced from salvation. Even intentional sin will not disqualify your salvation as long as you maintain your inner spiritual relationship with God.

Which then is this: Once you have been saved you are always saved regardless of your conduct. And that's what the Baptists teach. They have Nicolaitanism, and that's what Worldwide is teaching now.

There was a woman one time who said she was trying to explain some things to her Baptist friend who said, 'No, regardless of what I do I'm saved. When the rapture comes I'll be raptured off.' She looked her right in the eye and said, 'You mean if you are right in the middle of committing the act of adultery, that you would be raptured?' She said, 'Yes.'

pg 128—Gnostic Ascetic Spirituality

...This is perfectly legitimate, they believe, *if* it is interpreted as protecting man from materialistic passions that tie him to the world, and as long as it is not associated with the deception of the Old Testament and Judaism....

That is you can do whatever you want.

...Thus, Gnostics could rail against the Old Testament and the evil Creator God Yahweh, and proclaim liberation from Hebrew law, and then turn right around and substitute their own rules for human conduct that sometimes was quite similar or even more strict—than the laws of the Bible.

Read *The Code of Jewish Law* by Ganzfield & Goldin. That is more strict! I mean you talk about strict. What it is, it's the type where they have so many laws they don't want you to think. You are bound up by those laws. Now this gets into a little bit of Col. 2, which we'll cover a little later.

Individual ascetic practices varied widely. Marriage commonly was forbidden [1-Tim. 4], also wine and eating of meat [1-Tim. 4]. Water usually was substituted for wine in celebrating the Lord's supper....

That's exactly what the Mormons do today. Precisely. Mormonism is the most Gnostic religion today as far as getting right back to the believing in angels and so forth. That's what they say, when you're saved you become like an angel.

pg 129—Some [Gnostics] promoted systems of magical charms to overcome the evil angels who blocked the soul from ascending through the planetary spheres after death....

That is to reach heaven.

...Others provided secret passwords to accomplish the same goal....

Masons! Secret handshakes! And when the Mormons are married in the temple they are given a secret temple name.

...Some sects taught that Christian converts obtained various forms of power that rendered them invisible to the evil angels. Valentinian Gnostics believed their sacraments provided them with a spiritual body of light that made them invisible to the demons. They believed that participation in the Eucharist clothed them with the spiritual body of Christ, and this was the guarantee that they were spiritual and would be saved.

Which comes right down into the Catholic doctrine of taking the Eucharist today. That the only way to be saved is through the Eucharist.

We'll continue with this because this is very important. When we get into the section concerning Thyatira that it's developed even more. But suffice to say that Gnosticism and Nicolaitanism is alive and well in this world. One of the things that the Gnostics did was that they said, because the Sabbath was given of the God of the Old Testament, therefore they have a new revelation that they now keep the eighth day instead of the seventh, and the eighth day is the first day of the week. That came in early, early on.

That's why it's so important to understand that Hebrews was written to Hellenistic Christians who were being infiltrated with the Gnostics, infiltrated with this thing, Sunday-keeping and so forth, and having a totally wrong perspective concerning the Old Covenant and the animal sacrifices and the New Covenant in Christ's sacrifice. This is really dynamite stuff and ties it all together. I know it's a little laborious to read some of these things but there is so much that it's absolutely incredible.

All Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version* by Fred R. Coulter

Scriptural References:

- Revelation 2:12-17, 12
- Hebrews 4:12-13
- Revelation 19:11-16
- Revelation 2:13-14
- Deuteronomy 12:28-32
- Numbers 25:1-15
- Micah 5:11-15
- Micah 6:1-8

- Matthew 16:6-12
- Matthew 20:25
- Acts 8:9-11
- Matthew 20:26
- 1 Peter 5:1-4
- 1 John 4:1-3, 5-6
- 2 Thessalonians 2:7
- Matthew 7:21-22, 13, 22-23

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Revelation 1
- Numbers 22:24
- Revelation 17
- John 1:1-3
- Revelation 12
- 1 Timothy 4

Also Referenced:

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- *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop
- *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* by Alan Knight
- *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright* by J.H. Allen (herbert-armstrong.org/Miscellaneous/Judahs%20Sceptre%20&%20Josephs%20Birthright%20%28J.H.Allen%29.pdf)
- *My Catholic Faith* by Louis LaRavoire (amazon.com)
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- *Hebrews*
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Article: *The Nicolaitans* by J.H. Allen ([friendsofsabbath.org/Further_Research/e-books/THE_NICOLAITANS_\(J_H_Allen\).pdf](http://friendsofsabbath.org/Further_Research/e-books/THE_NICOLAITANS_(J_H_Allen).pdf))

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