

THE MIND IS EVERYTHING

Brian Orchard, February 4, 2023

Last night after dinner I went into my office and there on my computer screen was a little square informing me that there was a new article posted on our Leading to Life website. I clicked on it and I opened it up and wanted to have a look at it and see how it turned out. I'm going to use the first line of that article as an introduction to what I want to talk about today. You may recognize it since I believe this line was uttered here in this congregation.

"If there has ever been a group of people that are called upon to use their minds it is the followers of Christ who have chosen to live His way of life."

It's the use of the mind that I want to talk about today. I feel there are some fairly serious implications from that. When Christ told the Apostle John to write in a book the things he would be shown by Christ and it was to be sent to the seven churches in Asia, we can be reasonably confident that it contains information for the Church down through the ages including to this time today. The book of Revelation begins by saying that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

11 ... "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: (and it lists the seven churches.) I

18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

So, it's clear that there is some important information contained in here. What we're going to do today is look at one aspect of one of the churches. We need to be able to

read, hear and keep some very important information that Christ has for us. There's just one warning in the midst of other things pertaining to the Church in Pergamos. After addressing the angel of the Church in Pergamos:

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, (then it makes it very clear as a time reference when it says) who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

This statement is internal to the Church. Not external. He's addressing the Church. What stands out in verse 14 is the doctrine of Balaam. That is what I want to address today.

The Church has experienced many external problems over the last two thousand years. But none of them were more deadly than those which came from inside, the internal problems of the Church. The doctrine of Balaam is identified with Balak and the children of Israel. We have something quite specific to work with and it applies from the time that that took place through into the Church today. You and I are being told we must deal with the doctrine of Balaam. That it is going to appear in the Church in some form. Balaam did not receive particularly good press in the Bible:

Jude 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

If your name were to appear in God's word you wouldn't want to be in that context, with Cain, and Korah. We'll see what the "for profit" situation is as well. The doctrine of Balaam was associated with the Church in Pergamos because it had taken its root there.

Pergamos was a prominent capital city about eight to ten miles inland. Behind it, apparently, was a hill that went up from the city which was observable by everybody who lived there. And scattered over that hill were a number of temples for false worship. The temple of Zeus was one of those situated so that everybody in the town could see it. It was a prominent feature, among these pagan temples up on the hill behind Pergamos. To fill in more detail about the situation of Pergamos Christ says to them:

Revelation 2:13 "I know your works, (This is where He is lauding them for some good things before He starts the correction.) "I know your works, and where you dwell, (Stop to think about why Christ singled out where they dwell) where Satan's throne is.

There are two very important pieces of information regarding Pergamos – dwelling and Satan's throne. The word *thronos* translated throne means a place of special

authority. Not just a place where he existed but a place where he wielded special authority. The influence of Satan in Pergamos was profound.

The statement “where you dwell” is interesting because it means a settled place, permanent residence. He was acknowledging their permanent residence in Pergamos. The grammatical construction has Christ saying, “You are living in a city where the influence and the power of Satan is rampant and you have to continue living there. That is your permanent residence. You cannot escape. You cannot pack your bags and go someplace where it is easier to be a godly person.”

Christ is acknowledging the serious situation in Pergamos but He’s saying to the Church, “You’re going to have to stay there and conquer it and overcome it.”

The sense is that we don’t run away from difficult situations. Our aim is not to escape but to overcome, to conquer those difficult situations. I’m saying all this because we can relate to that. As I continue I want us to be able to relate more and more to today from this perspective. Apparently, some members were very successful in this endeavor of overcoming, being faithful because there’s an individual singled out there by Christ. He said:

13 ...And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

I have no idea who Antipas was. I’m saying ‘he’ because it sounds like a male name but it could have been a ‘she’. I have no idea how to identify that individual but it’s identified as being faithful to Christ’s name. The word martyr (*martus* from the Greek) simply means a witness. It means a witness, the primary meaning, but it includes being a witness unto death if necessary. The word martyr includes what we would normally think of – somebody being killed for their belief, holding onto the truth. But it can also mean a witness. Antipas was somebody who suffered to maintain his beliefs and faith in Christ. The suffering will be a witness to the faith in God to the point of death if necessary. We all understand from the scripture that there will be martyrdom in the future. We need to think of it as a witness to the faith of Christ:

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, (that’s the same word translated martyr.)

Jesus Christ was a faithful witness and if you wanted to say He was a martyr, He was a martyr for us in the sense that He gave His life, and we are to be a martyr for Him. Important background for the things they that were corrected for.

The doctrine of Balaam was obviously very damaging to the Church. Things sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality were tied to Pergamos’ intense pagan worship. If

you know anything about Zeus you understand it was intense pagan worship! We begin to appreciate the danger when we understand what is being referenced.

In Micah there is important information because it lifts the context of the doctrine of Balaam out of Revelation. It doesn't go back to when the instance first happened. This is in a book of prophecy. It just shows you that it is relevant for us today as something to consider:

Micah 6:5 O My people, remember now What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the Lord."

This is a learning situation from which we can learn something about God's righteousness versus man's righteousness. There is something in here of benefit to us. We're not just looking at historical facts from the past. This is something that's very relevant and we should learn something from it. The instance is recorded back in Numbers chapters 22 – 25.

In chapter 22 we begin the instance where the king of Moab, Balak, is very worried about the Israelites that are camped just across from his border. They haven't entered into the Promised Land yet. He's overly concerned because Israel did something terrible to the Amorites and he figured his head was the next head on the block. Genuinely concerned! And he wanted a curse pronounced upon the Israelites so that they wouldn't be a danger to him.

He sent for Balaam. Balaam was a high priest of the pagan worship system as far as I can gather. He wasn't a regular, common priest down the road type. They sent for him a long way away. He had a reputation almost as far back as Abraham, where he originally started out from. That's quite some distance. It took time for the emissaries from King Balak to go to Balaam and they promised him a great deal of wealth, to come back and pronounce a curse on Israel (This is where the profit aspect comes in.) And, he had a pretty good reputation up to that point at pronouncing curses. Balak want him to come and curse Israel.

There was a little bit of a problem inasmuch as God didn't want him to do that. God says, "No. You can't go."

Numbers 22:12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

That's one of the things we learn from this, how God views His people, how He cares for His people and how He limits Satan's ability on our behalf. Now, we go backwards and forwards a little bit until God says:

Numbers 22:20 ... "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you — that you shall do."

God has drawn limits on what Balaam is able to do. Balaam represents Satan. There are limits that Satan is held by and the blessings that God has pronounced upon His people comes into play there. Satan cannot stop what God wills to get done.

So they came back and Balaam rode on a donkey and then you get this very interesting situation. The donkey sees an angel with a large sword standing in the way. Balaam doesn't see it so he gets angry with the donkey and gets a big stick and whacks it three times trying to make it go. Then the angel reveals itself.

Then we go through all the backwards and forwards with the donkey talking to Balaam. Balaam talking to the donkey. Now, if you were off a bit in the distance watching this it would have been interesting seeing a human talking to a donkey and a donkey talking back to him. But that's exactly what happened.

35 Then the Angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

God's still not happy with the situation but has allowed him to go. Continuing through three accounts where Balak takes Balaam to a certain elevated position so that they can see the vastness of the children of Israel. They offer offerings, seven bulls, seven rams, something of that nature. Then Balak says, "Go at it. Give them a curse!" Balaam says, "Let me just check with God first." So, he wanders off. God tells him what to do. He goes back and he opens his mouth and out of his mouth comes forward a blessing upon the children of Israel. Balak was not very happy at this point in time.

This happened three times. Three times Balaam blessed Israel instead of cursing them because God spoke through his mouth. God told him what the situation was going to be. In chapter 24 we come to the last instance of this taking place. Balak has lost his cool at this point. He's invested a lot of money, gold, silver, promises and so on to Balaam but he's not getting his money's worth out of him. And so, Balaam ended up by blessing Israel and departing.

Numbers 24:25 So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way. (After an angry exchange between the two of them.)

Up to that point in time we have a nice story of God's intervention on behalf of Israel. He pronounced blessings instead of cursings on Israel. Then we immediately run into the situation:

Numbers 25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

What has happened to bring that about? There's a gap between the end of the previous chapter and the beginning of this one that doesn't give us a lot of information.

2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

And a great curse came down upon them. This doesn't quite seem to fit with what we've read in the previous three chapters before this point in time. I'm going to use Josephus to fill in the gap a bit. It's an important teaching instrument. Josephus fills in the details, which are supported by scripture. I'll read the scripture in a minute that supports it.

What Balaam told Balak was to take the best looking young women of Moab and parade them where the young men of the Israel camp could see them knowing full well that the young men of Israel would go after the beautiful women of Moab. He puts it in his own words. He says, *"By this means God will be angry with them."*

They were now setting themselves up to bring the curse upon themselves. It's not Balaam's curse. And three times in this section from Josephus (It's the Antiquities of the Jews, Book 4 section 6.) it references young men, the youth. It's going to become important as I develop this subject a little further. The young men were the ones attracted to the beautiful young women of the Moabites. But as Josephus brings out, when the young men were enamored with the young women, the young women were to introduce their gods, their way of worship to them and the young men would then follow into the pagan worship of Moab, which they did.

But as Josephus brings out that *"even the principle men, the leaders of Israel, were illustrious on account of the virtues of their fathers, they also were corrupted with the rest."* A little leaven leavens the whole lump. And that was the advice that Balaam gave Balak, to bring a curse upon themselves. Balaam had no power, no authority from God to do it but Israel could do it to themselves and that is exactly what happened.

Numbers 31:16 Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.

Israel suffered as a result of the advice that had been given by Balaam to Balak. The doctrine of Balaam is to cause the children of Israel to trespass against God and arouse His anger against them. Israel failed to see Satan's deceptive mind at work. They embraced their own destruction. You can take this and apply it any number of ways. You can lift this up and overlay it over our national situations today and it's the same. Satan's method is no different. A little more subtle, perhaps and a little different in application but Satan wants Israel to destroy itself and Israel is complying very well. I want to transition to 2023.

I believe that Christ would say, if He were here today, "I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." Now, it might not be one specific location but Satan, as the prince of the power of the air has turned the volume up loud. He has cranked up the broadcast of his attitudes to humanity to an extremely high and powerful rate. We are living in an environment where the influence and power of Satan is rampant, but we have to go on living here. This is where we live. We cannot pack up your bags and go someplace where it is easier.

Some people think Montana is the place to go. Go and buy property in Montana and get away from it all. There was a balloon stationed over Montana this week. What do you think that balloon was doing? Where are many our missile silos located? They're probably figuring out there's no good dropping an atomic bomb or nuclear weapon on San Francisco. It's already wiped itself out. I'll bomb Montana.

There is nowhere to go. We understand that. He is the god of this world and his influence is everywhere. He's becoming more and more powerful as he cranks it up Satan is still working to put stumbling blocks before God's people as he did in the situation Balaam and Balak. Now, I want you to look at the following verses through the eyes of what we've been discussing, how Satan operates.

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, (Internal, this is internal. This is not external.) **even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,** (Heresies from the false teachers that if adopted will be destructive.) **even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.** (Is that not what we have just read in this example of the doctrine of Balaam?)

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. (Into this mix he obviously has in mind Balaam because in verse 15 Balaam is referenced.)

15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

To go as far as God would allow in the wrong direction. Remember, Balaam had restrictions placed on him by God. But Balaam wanted to go as far as he possibly could in the way of unrighteousness and evil. If God drew the line that's exactly where he was located. Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness but had to stay within the boundaries set by God. How does this play out specifically in God's Church today? The key that we're going to look at involves the law of God. God's law is key to understanding this.

The Apostle Paul clearly informs us that the law is spiritual. The thing is the law has always been spiritual. It came from God in the beginning, and it was spiritual. Paul refers to the law in the Old Testament as being glorious! It is a spiritual law because it's coming from the mind and the heart of God. It always has been spiritual. The law is holy, just, and good.

We go to certain places in the gospels where Jesus Christ is saying that we are to embrace the law with our whole heart, our whole being. He's simply quoting out of Deuteronomy 6 in the Old Testament because Jesus Christ, the One who gave the law to Israel, understood its spiritual content then and now for the Church. The law has not changed in that sense of being spiritual in nature.

The law and the mind were to be connected. God was to be loved with our whole heart. That was told to the Israelites. That is what we've been told in the New Testament. The mind and God's law are to be connected. But as a great object lesson. The insight that God had to give us this object lesson, having said that to the Israelites, He did not give them His Holy Spirit. They had the spirit in man. That's a spirit from God but they had the spirit in man to deal with the law, which was spiritual. And so, they had the ability to obey the law in the letter. They could have, if they gave their whole heart, their whole being to God, they could have obeyed the letter of the law and benefitted from that. God says, "I will bless you if you obey me. It was a positive thing on God's part. He did not give them the Holy Spirit to serve as a real object lesson for us.

Israel dwelt where Satan's throne was. Satan was incredibly active as we saw from Balaam. Satan can move and motivate the human mind. God's parameters allow that. Whatever restrictions God has placed on Satan, He has allowed Satan to be able to influence our minds, human mind. He can still influence our mind. It's one of the battles in which we have is to stop Satan's influence. But he can influence our mind. As we see in the case of Balak and Job, Satan's attitude is to go as far as possible towards unrighteousness. Israel, without God's Holy Spirit, sought the way of Satan, which is to do evil.

We bring this down to our time today, the time that is near, according to Revelation 1.3. In this time today our environment equates with the environment of Pergamos. It is thoroughly pagan. It is evil. That was the influence of that city, and we can equate it to that today. We live where Satan's throne is. His throne is over this earth. He's confined to this earth. He is the god of this world, and he is powerful. We must meet this environment head-on. There's no escape. There's nowhere on the face of this earth that you can run to where you'll get away from the influence of Satan's mind. It just is not possible. The prince of the power of the air can broadcast to you wherever you are. We have the addition of God's Spirit. We are to live by the Spirit of the law,

the spiritual law. Now we've got a mind that can connect to that spiritual law and see it in its fullest, spiritual intent. What a fantastic blessing for us to have that kind of mind.

2 Corinthians 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?

2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, (This is the spiritual direction this discussion is going.) **known and read by all men;**

3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

4 And we have such trust through Christ toward God.

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

That's a little key there for you to think about as well. We can't do this on our own. We can't do it by human strength. Satan wants us to try. Satan wants you to think that you can handle it, that you're strong enough, you're wise enough, you're intelligent enough. You can handle it. Paul is saying, "No. That's not the case."

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, (That's each one of you.) **ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

The letter kills. That doesn't mean the letter is wrong. What we're being told here is, if you only live according to the letter of the law you're going to die. And it will be a permanent, eternal death unless something else comes into play. It kills because the letter is God's law. You break that, the penalty is death. It's through Christ that the Spirit gives life. That's what we are focused on in our lives. The letter kills is a key to the doctrine of Balaam. Satan wants you to live according to the letter of the law.

I think we've all been around the Church long enough to know that there are very clear instances of that within the Church – people who are living or have lived, continue to live according to the letter. It breeds self-righteousness. "I am obeying God's law; therefore, I am righteous." That's been throughout the Church as long as I've been associated with it.

In one sense it's easy to see. "I am doing what God has told me to do." That's like a minister telling you, "I will tell you what to do. You do it and you're a member in good standing." That's the letter of the law. The letter is good at setting out boundaries. You read God's law, law by law and boundaries are set, parameters as God did with Balaam and Satan with Job.

We don't worship idols of wood, stone, and gold. We go to services on the seventh day. We don't dishonor our parents. We don't have sex outside of marriage. We don't kill other people. You can go on with other aspects of God's law. We don't do that. So, are we righteous? Is that it? Is that what it's about?

On face value, if you obey those points one can feel righteous, or right with God. I think, to be honest, we all had periods of our lives where that has been the case. We felt good about ourselves because we're doing what we've been told to do. Inject the mind of Satan into this, the doctrine of Balaam comes into play. The letter of the law defines physical boundaries. If we stay within those boundaries, we think ourselves righteous.

I am taking the position that most members of God's Church want to obey God's laws. We accept the boundaries. Many people in the past in Worldwide accepted doctrinal changes, everything up until the point God's law was done away and that was the last straw for many people. However, we need to factor in God's Holy Spirit, which we have received at baptism.

Galatians 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (That's a very important point), even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. (You will die, period.)

17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

If we only live by the letter of the law, the letter kills. But through Jesus Christ we died while we continue to live. He took that death penalty upon Himself and He paid it. That's why we have life through the Spirit, through Jesus Christ – real life.

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

It's clear we need to step above, yes, the letter of the law stays there. That foundation has not been ripped out and thrown away. It's there but we've been called to receive God's Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ and step up to another level, to live at the spiritual level, not the letter of the law. If we stay at the letter of the law, which Satan wants you to do because if you do that you're dead! Satan wins. That's exactly what

he wants. He wants you to think you're righteous because you are obeying the letter of the law. He wants you to be self-satisfied at that level because he's got you. He wins in the end.

Christ came so that we could step up to the other level and live at this other level, this spiritual level. That's why He gave His life for us. The value of the law is in Christ's sacrifice, faith in Christ's sacrifice, the law exacted its penalty and Christ paid it:

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, (which comes through faith in Jesus Christ) and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (That's the example of Israel.)

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

He is the end of the law. The end purpose, the goal, the definite point. Israel addressed the letter, which was their own righteousness, in ignorance perhaps as it says but it was false. How is Christ the end?

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (We're free to be able to live this spiritual life.)

3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Life! We have life because we can walk according to the Spirit. A point that is difficult to grasp but I think we should try to get it is, Christ is the end of the law. Jesus Christ did not sin. Not because He had a power of mind, the power of God's Spirit to resist when that temptation to sin came within Him and He wanted to sin He had the power to put it down. Jesus Christ did not want to sin! Can you imagine that? He did not have the desire within Him, as God in the flesh, to sin! That's the mind you and I have. Now, it's not doing its job to that extent but that's what we have to work with. Christ didn't want to sin. Christ didn't look for the boundaries. Where is the boundary of this law? Humans do. I've seen this over and over in God's Church. Somebody

always wants to know where the boundary is so they can stay within it, do what I want to do but still have the hope of eternal life.

Christ exemplified the spiritual intent of the law. He obliterated the letter of the law boundaries. He didn't obliterate the law but the boundaries that are established as being a source of righteousness. He drew us back into the center; the true spiritual nature of each law is in the center. And if you are seeking the true spiritual nature of the law you don't want to know where the boundaries are. You're not interested in where the boundaries are. How far can I go and still receive eternal life? That's not godly thinking. That wasn't Christ's thinking, and it should not be our thinking.

The doctrine of Balaam will want us to go as far away from the spirit of the law as possible. Satan wants us to keep the strict letter of the law but not the spirit because the letter kills. Exactly what Balaam told Balak. "Get the Israelites to bring a curse on themselves!" Satan wants us to bring a curse on ourselves. He's doing well with the nation as a whole but he's still got his finger on the Church. He wants you to do what modern Israel, at large, is doing.

Each spiritual intent is a principle. It's a principle. We should see it that way because there are areas of our physical lives where God has not spelled out clearly, exactly what He wants us to do. He's left us in, dare I say, some gray areas (they're not really gray when you apply this principle) for us to think about the principles of God's law and apply them. Think it through in your mind. Work out what would Christ's mind be on this matter now? I can't turn to an exact scripture but there's a principle that covers this action.

Mr. Armstrong wrote in his autobiography about smoking. You can't turn to a scripture in God's word that I'm aware of that says, "Thou shall not smoke Marlboro." Real men smoke Marlboro. But he gave the demonstration of a principle which he applied. Outgoing love and concern for other people. So, he applied the principle to come up with a conclusion. We are to take the principle and use our "mind of the Spirit" to see how to apply it. The doctrine of Balaam may sound old-fashioned, a relic of the past so to speak, but it is alive and active amongst us today.

I'm going to give you a couple of examples that come to my mind because they've stayed very clearly in my mind. When we left Worldwide many took with them some of the changes that had already been made because they liked them, the watering down, the backing away from certain things.

I was asked by a young man to counsel with him and so I sat down and he wanted to inform me that the Church was wrong to take up offerings on the seven annual Holy Days. And now that we've broken away from Worldwide we should address this and rectify the problem. Why? Because it says, Deuteronomy 16, and you read it many times throughout the year, three times in a year you bring an offering to God. So, he

said only three times. You don't do it seven. You only do it three. Letter of the law. It does say three times in a year but you go and look at the Holy Days as they were celebrated in Israel and every Holy Day had offerings that had to be offered. During the Feast of Tabernacles every day you had to offer offerings. What would be the principle? Why would you want to decline bringing on a Holy Day an offering before God? He says, "Don't appear before me empty." So, if you only do it three times which Holy Days are you going to pick to bring your offering?

There are two for Unleavened Bread. Is it the first one? Is it the second one? You come before God with an offering one day. You come before Him empty the next. I'm being a little bit silly about it but that's what we've got to think through. I would want to bring an offering before God on every Holy Day if it didn't even say three times in a year. It means the three seasons. I think we can appreciate that. But here is somebody, letter of the law, "I'm only going to do it three times because that's what it says." And he falls short. He absolutely falls short.

Here is another one that some of you sitting right here will identify. I don't know if I should use it or not, but it stuck in my mind. There was a time in the dim past when I was the Y.O.U. coordinator for this district. A long time ago. We had regional weekends where the whole district, all the Y.O.U. would get together. One year it was Fresno.

The district went from Reno to Fresno, so we all gathered in Fresno. There must have been eight hundred people that day in that hall. It was the YOU district weekend, so we had services. There was a dance on Saturday night then all the sport activities on Sunday.

The director of ministerial services was invited to come and give the sermon. The timing was when Mr. Armstrong changed the ruling on women wearing makeup. There had been a rather strict approach to women wearing makeup. Mr. Armstrong was trying to bring in more of a spiritual intent approach and so it was announced that weekend, a little bit, tastefully done, would be fine.

I don't know if those of you who were there remembered the stampede that happened after services down to the local cosmetic stores. We turned up at the dance that night and here are the women plastered with makeup. Once the boundary was there and they stayed within the boundaries, at least on the Sabbath. Later found out they were wearing makeup throughout the week but didn't dare come to Church with it on. That's letter of the law. That's a perfect illustration of that boundary. I'll stay within the boundary because that's what the Church requires. Lift the boundary and Satan's got you on the run.

Tithing. How many times have we had to address, "How much have I got to tithe? What must I give to God?" This is the letter of the law stuff. You could go on and on.

I went online to check what they had to say about the doctrine of Balaam. So, I went online to check that I wasn't going crazy. Here is one sentence: "Satan understands humanities' soft underbelly. After all, it's his attitude that formed it." The prince of the power of the air knows how to get the human mind to dance to his tune.

Satan can only operate within the limits set by God but through his "prince of the power of the air" attributes he can seduce God's people to bring a curse on themselves. Why is the Church in the condition it's in today? There's a little bit of a debate going on. Not a big debate but there are some people who believe that Christ Himself broke up the Church into all of these individual units. That Christ engineered that. I'm not of that school. Did Christ engineer it, or did Christ allow it? Did we bring this on ourselves by our conduct when we were altogether as one group under the Worldwide Church of God? And having served my time in Pasadena I'm opting for the latter. We brought this on ourselves. We were off track and Christ let it happen. We're in this mess we're in of our own, individual creation, really, when you think about it.

Does he operate any differently today? In preparing the last Bible Study that I gave on 1 John I came across some interesting material from William Barclay. He does have some reasonable things to offer in terms of knowledge of the Greek language. In his commentary on 1 John, he says this:

"It is to be noted that First John shows no signs that the Church to which it was written was being persecuted. (The pressure was not coming from outside, in other words.) The peril, as it has been put, was not persecution but seduction; it came from within. (That's what we just read out of Peter. It came from within.) That, too, Jesus had foreseen when he said, "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray." (Then he makes this point.)

"The trouble which First John seeks to combat did not come from men out to destroy the Christian faith but from men who thought they were improving it. (We need to think about that. They didn't think they were going to destroy the Church but they were going to improve it.) It came from men whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectable. They knew the intellectual tendencies and currents of the day and felt that the time had come for Christianity to come to terms with secular philosophy and contemporary thought."

He's right on for our experience coming through Worldwide to where we are here today. That's exactly what happened in Worldwide. Of course, digging up through some of this stuff brought memories to mind. When I was a young minister in Australia, we were given a binder, a thick binder that we were to preach from. It was the result of what was called the Systematic Theology Project (STP). Many of you probably never heard of it. In the 1970s Mr. Armstrong went overseas on trips to world leaders preaching the gospel as he understood it at that time. His son was left in charge in Pasadena to run the work day by day.

He gathered around him a group of neo-intellectuals who decided that the doctrines of the Church needed to be upgraded, improved. Exactly what Barclay is saying. And so, they sat down and put together a Systematic Theology Project. Do you understand the word theology? It's man's concepts of God. We, as the ministry received this binder, and we were to preach from it. There was some good stuff in it but there was just enough off to cause doctrinal deviation.

When Mr. Armstrong found out about it we were ordered to return our folders. I was quite happy to do that, no problem whatsoever. That's the kind of thing that Satan wants to do. How many people hold to beliefs, doctrinal beliefs which they believe are improvements over what Mr. Armstrong used to teach us? I've had many, many phone calls from people I don't know and I'll probably never hear from them again after the conversation we have, who want to inform me that they have a better understanding of this doctrine or that doctrine than anybody else. God has revealed it to them. How many times have we had to contend with that in recent years? The doctrine of Balaam is alive and well.

The peril to the Church is not persecution, but seduction from within. The bottom line is the mind is everything! Your mind, the mind that you've received through the Spirit of God is absolutely everything! The environment of the city of Pergamos provides a perfect setting for such seduction. In Revelation 2, we have a situation where Satan's throne is in existence and in amongst the Church exists those who hold the doctrine of Balaam. They're in the Church. They're not outside the Church. And they're trying to convince people to go as far as they can within the letter of the law. And if you want to understand things sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality, pagan worship takes you right there, directly there. Any aspect of pagan worship will take you there.

What are we battling today? If you want to do a little bit of research, you'll find that the things sacrificed to idols and the sexual immorality tie together because the idol worship involved taking a sacrifice to the temple and then that sacrifice was later turned into a feast in the temple so those all tie together.

Balaam's recipe for Israel was to have them follow their carnal desires largely based on sex; having them destroy themselves by following Satan's mind. I have another quote sent to me by one of our elders this week. Again, these things prompt thoughts.

"The Left will stop at nothing to force everyone, irrespective of moral objections, to celebrate lifestyle choices of which they disapprove. (You're not allowed the option. You must approve of these deviant lifestyles.)"

The 1960s revolution was both anarchic and nihilist. But it was waged against – not from – the establishment. (I, unfortunately, had the opportunity to live through the revolution of the sixties. It was call the sexual revolution fueled by drugs. But it was

against the establishment, trying to tear the establishment down. Trying to get the establishment to accept their hippie ways.)

The Current revolution is much different – and far more dangerous – THE ESTABLISHMENT IS THE REVOLUTION.”

Satan has ramped up his power, his strength, his broadcast. Now, instead of wrong versus right (it was never quite that clear) now we are fighting the establishment to maintain our doctrinal integrity. In case you wonder what he means by the establishment, he says:

“It now controls the very institutions of America that it once mocked and attacked” (in the sixties) – “corporate boardrooms, Wall Street, state and local prosecuting attorneys, most big-city governments, the media, the Pentagon, Network and most of cable news, professional sports, Hollywood, music, television, K-12 education, and academia.”

I don't think he missed a thing of these institutions that influence our thought processes in society. This revolution is a major fight. It's a major battle that we are engaged in, and we need to understand that. We need to be able to resist the doctrine of Balaam infiltrating God's Church. I come back to the fact that the mind is everything.

I had prepared the whole sermon and I got to this point and the question is, how can we develop the mind necessary to withstand the doctrine of Balaam? But as I began to formalize my notes I realized we probably have people dropping off the window ledge at midnight if I continue the thought to completion.

I'm going to break it there and say, we've got a lot to think about this week. We'll be streaming from here again next week and I will go into the next part of this very important understanding of the doctrine of Balaam.