



[Revelation 2:14-15](#)

(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. (15) Moreover, you also have *those* who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

A Faithful Version

The structure of this paragraph ties together the doctrine of Balaam, the sins of eating things sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality, and the doctrine of the [Nicolaitans](#). Christ implies that all three are the same basic heresy under different guises. This antinomian teaching affected the church in Thyatira as well ([Revelation 2:20-21](#)).

[Moses](#) records Balaam's story in Numbers 22-25, 31. Balak, king of Moab, hires Balaam to curse the Israelites, but every time he tries, Balaam instead blesses them. He then counsels Balak to send Moabite and Midianite women into the camp of Israel to seduce the men and invite them to the sacrifices of their [god](#) ([Numbers 25:1-2](#); [31:16](#)). Clearly, Balaam's instruction included getting the Israelites to commit idolatry and sexual immorality.

Interestingly, these two practices arise in the Jerusalem Council in AD 49. Paul and [Barnabas](#), with Peter's help, convince the assembled elders that Gentile converts to Christianity should not be required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, Judaism's rigorous "yoke" of picayune laws ([Acts 15:10](#)). However, the Council enjoins the Gentiles on four points of typical Gentile religious practice:

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. ([Acts 15:28-29](#))

Obviously, the Council's decree does not exempt Gentiles from keeping the Ten Commandments, for it is clear from many New Testament passages that [Jesus](#) and the apostles taught them to both Jews and Gentiles (e.g., [Matthew 19:17-19](#); [Romans 13:9](#); etc.). These two issues—idolatry and sexual immorality—became a flashpoint in the conflict between true Christianity and Hellenistic [Gnosticism](#), and a person's stance on them exposed which side he favored. Thus, Nicolaitanism and Balaamism are biblical symbols or representatives of the larger Gnostic, antinomian influence on Christianity.

Is Nicolaitanism passé? Evidently not, for Jesus' admonitions in Revelation 2 indicate that this antinomian influence will remain until His return. Notice His warnings to Pergamos and Thyatira:

[Repent](#), or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. . . . But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of [Satan](#) [another allusion to antinomianism], as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. (Revelation 2:16, 24-25)

This does not mean that the particular sins of eating meat sacrificed to idols and sexual license will pervade the church until the end, although idolatry and sexual sins will certainly exist in it. He is more concerned about the antinomian spirit, the attitude of lawlessness, that allows these sins to infest the church. When members of the church teach and practice that they are not obliged to keep the laws of God, [sin](#) will inevitably break out vigorously. When this occurs, Christians are no longer under grace but under the penalty of the law and the wrath of the Judge ([Romans 6:11-23](#); [Hebrews 10:26-31](#); [12:25](#)).

Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude, and John warn against the encroachment of antinomianism or lawlessness. In His Olivet Prophecy, Jesus says: "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the [love of many will grow cold](#)" ([Matthew 24:11-12](#)). What will happen to such lawless people? Jesus Himself answers:

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" ([Matthew 7:22-23](#))

Among Paul's end-time prophecies is his prediction of a great apostasy that results from the unrestrained assault of "the mystery of lawlessness" ([II Thessalonians 2:1-7](#)). This comes

with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. . . . Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught. . . . ([II Thessalonians 2:10-12](#), 15)

Peter and Jude use similar language in their books to counter the antinomian teaching extant in their congregations ([II Peter 2:9-10](#), 12-13, 15, 18-19; 3:17-18; [Jude 3-4](#)). John's epistles are likewise full of warnings against antinomian [heresies](#). For instance, notice these passages:

» Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ([I John 2:3-4](#))

» Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ([I John 3:4](#))

» In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. ([I John 3:10](#))

» By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. ([I John 5:2-3](#))

» This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. . . . Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. ([II John 6](#), 9-11)

» Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. ([III John 11](#))

In addition, [the gospel](#) of John uses Jesus' own words during His ministry to attack antinomian heresies in the church. This much scriptural attention along with its prophetic implications warrants our taking careful notice.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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