

## Syncretism in the Church

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The Lord Jesus told the apostle John to write to the seven churches in Asia. To the Church in Pergamum, John wrote what the Lord gave him saying, *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. <sup>13</sup> I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”* (Revelation 2:12-16 NIV)

Balaam was a prophet for profit. He acknowledged God and that his gift came from Him (Numbers 22:38) but he was a diviner. He was for hire and Balak, King of Moab hired him to curse the nation of Israel. The Bible says he received a fee for divination (Numbers 22:7) however; he was forced to speak blessings over Israel. This angered Balak and he refused to give Balaam the great honor that was promised him if he cursed Israel. Balaam found a way to please Balak by telling him that if Israel sinned against the Lord then, He would severely judge them. Balaam advised Balak to invite Israel to a feast to their gods which involved animal sacrifices, revelry and sexual immorality with the men and women of Moab and; bowing down to worship Baal-peor. Many in Israel participated in Balak's feast and the Bible says that the Lord's anger was kindled and He ordered the leaders and the people of Israel who joined Moab's god, Baal-peor, to be killed. God sent a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites. (Numbers 25:1-18)

### **The Bible says this about other gods:**

Exodus 20:3-6 NKJV - <sup>3</sup> *“You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup> but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”*

The apostle Paul warned the church about the consequences of idolatry and used Old Testament scripture to prove that God is the same and his word remains. (1 Corinthians

10:1-33) The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 NIV, *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” <sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” <sup>8</sup> We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup> We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.”*

The Bible mentions "the error of Balaam," "the way of Balaam," and in our text, the Lord Jesus addresses "the teaching of Balaam." The Lord Jesus is telling the pastor that there are people in the church enticing and encouraging others to sin. The doctrine or teaching of Balaam is to corrupt the people who could not be cursed unless they sinned by encouraging them to abandon God in favor of serving other gods.

The Bible says in 1 John 4:1-6 NIV, *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. <sup>4</sup> You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”*

The apostle John told the Church to test the spirit to see if it is false. The way we do this is to compare what we hear, read, and see to the Bible. The Bible says after the apostle Paul preached to the Jews in Berea, they went home and searched the scriptures to make sure that what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11-12) Because Paul taught the truth, there was no confusion. The Bible says many of them believed. The Church is teaching things that are against what the Bible says. From Genesis to Revelation the Church is told that idolatry is evil. And, the Lord is the only true and living God. The Bible says in Acts 4:11-12 NIV, *“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

The apostle John says in 1 John 4:2 NIV, “*This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*” There are people in different religions that believe that Jesus Christ lived in the earth and was a prophet. However, Jesus Christ came in the flesh means more. The Lord Jesus came into the earth as Lord and Savior; fully God and fully man to save the world from sin and death.

No other human being was able to do this work but the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the only Son sent by God the Father for all mankind. Jesus Christ came in the flesh means God with us, God dwelt amongst us, God died for us and rose, God gave himself as the only living perfect sacrifice. It means acknowledging that the Lord Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only way our sins can be forgiven, the only one we praise and worship, the only one we pray to and through for help, the only one who is coming back to claim the church; and the list goes on and on.

The Lord Jesus said that some were holding to the doctrine of the *Nicolaitans* which He hated. It is not clear what the doctrine/teaching involved but we know it was false because the Lord hates false. False doctrine/teaching is idolatry because it encourages people to abandon God’s teaching for another. The Lord stressed that it was coming from others within the church. Many Christians today are involved in syncretism which is the act of infusing the practices of worldly religions into Christianity. One way it has taken shape is in the form of mindfulness through the trend of Yoga. Some in the Church are trivializing the religious practice of Yoga by setting up sanctuaries in their homes, purchasing mats and carved or molten statutes, idols that depict Buddha or Kunti (*whose mantra/sacred utterance or chant is supposed to invoke other gods*). Christians are recruiting others (*like in the Church in Pergamum*) to participate calling it exercise and meditation. Yoga is an invitation for Satan to wreak havoc in the lives of the Church.

The Lord Jesus wants us to meditate on his word, and rest in him. (Joshua 1:8) Theologian Derek Prince said that before we engage in something that the world has made a craze, we may want to keep two scriptures in mind:

- 1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJV, “*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”
- Colossians 3:17 NKJV, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*”

We must ask ourselves: What is acceptable to God? Did God give this to us? Does this glorify God?

I read a small amount of literature about Yoga and learned that Yoga’s literature and techniques are derived from Sanskrit which is the Indo-European language of the

Vedas. The Vedas are India's ancient religious text also known as the oldest scriptures of Hinduism. There is a Yoga guidebook called Yoga Sutra of Patanjali which was written based on the Hindu scriptures. The guidebook provides the framework upon which all yoga is practiced today. Sutra of Patanjali is an idol, his molten image is a half man with his hands pressed together in a prayer-like formation and his bottom half is a snake. Exodus 20:3-6 says, *"You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup> 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup> but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

- Now let's ask the question – Is it acceptable to the Lord that we practice with our body and mind techniques that are derived from Hindu scriptures? Did God give this to us? Does this glorify God?

The Lord God told Israel not to follow the gods of the Canaanites. The Lord told the Church in Thyatira that false teachings are the depths of Satan. (Revelation 2:24) No matter how Christians package Yoga its root origins cannot be dismissed. In a basic yoga class, there are a series of positions that are designed to greet the Hindu sun god. Christians are hosting Yoga parties and practicing and teaching poses that are named after animals such as the downward facing-dog, cat pose, fish pose, cow face pose, cobra pose, camel pose, turtle pose, crow pose, peacock, eagle, scorpion, frog – even a corpse and the list goes on. We can see that Satan doesn't have to change his tactics because it's a mind thing: Instead of having people carve or purchase the molten image of animals and reptiles, he has convinced people to turn their bodies into these images. The Bible says, *"Gird up the loins of your mind"* (1 Peter 1:13) meaning prepare your mind for battle because Satan has all kinds of wiles. The Bible says that we are not to conform to this world but present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. (Romans 12:1-2)

There are churches around the world that have opened their doors and set up sanctuaries for their congregations to participate in Yoga. Pastors have turned holy ground consecrated unto Christ into temples for Yoga which is the practice of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. Christians have set up what the Bible calls groves around their homes and are also going up on God's mountains, hills, and to retreat centers. The Bible tells us that the religions of the Canaanites required the same type of worship. (*Deuteronomy 7:5, Deuteronomy 16:21 and there are other scriptures*) The Bible says that Abraham built a grove and called on the name of the Lord; (Genesis 21:33) however, God made sure to tell Israel not to plant a grove. Abraham still needed to let go of the things he did for so long in the country he was called out of. Israel was called

out of Egypt and they were to let go of the way they worshiped. The Israelites were quick to build a calf for worship when Moses did not come down from the mountain in the time they expected. (Exodus 32:1-35). The men and women listed in the Bible were not perfect; however, the perfect, all-knowing God wrote their accounts through men so that we can see God helping man to live for Him and through Him.

The Bible says in Colossians 2:8-10 NIV says, *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority."* (I encourage you to read the entire book of Colossians)

Yoga is philosophy, vain deceit, a tradition of men and it was developed after the rudiments/origins of this world and not after Christ. Flee idolatry! (1 Corinthians 10:14)

The Lord Jesus rebuked the church saying, *"Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."* (Revelation 2:16-17)