

The Seven Churches

Part 3 – Letter to The Church in Pergamum

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Introduction:

We are in the third week of our seven week series on the seven churches of Revelation. Today, we will focus our attention on the third church Jesus addressed, the church at Pergamum.

Before we get into the Letter to the Church of Pergamum, I want to preface this message with a very important thought. It is a truth which is so vital for us to understand.

Revelation 1:3 says... *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”* John declared a blessing (Divine Favor) upon those who would **READ** the words of this prophecy, **HEAR** with their hearts what God is saying, and **HEED** (*regard, listen to or follow*). *Like a sign on a highway, bridge washed out ahead, you MUST detour...we must really consider what the message is to these 7 churches and embrace it!*

In some Christian circles the Book of Revelation is looked upon as merely history during the Roman Empire and its interaction with the early church. Therefore, some interpret it as not having much relevance today.

But I want to draw your attention to what Jesus Himself said ... **Chapter 1:19** *“therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”*

Therefore, we can understand that Jesus is telling us that this prophecy dealt with what the Apostle John experienced with Jesus. It tells us what John experienced after the resurrection and his long ministry which included pastoring the church of Ephesus. It also tells us about the future, which includes the times we are living in now in the 21st Century and the future.

This is such an important truth to consider, because this tells us **the Book of Revelation is extremely relevant for us today**. In fact, Jesus ends every letter to each of His churches by saying *“...He who has **ears to hear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

In light of that, we should open our hearts and our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us today through this message and all that He would have us to hear in the days to come.

John the Apostle, while exiled on the Island of Patmos received a vision of the Resurrected Jesus. In that vision, he was given what we know as the Book of Revelation. In the first chapters, Jesus gave him letters to write to each of the seven churches. These seven churches were prominent churches in their day. Bible scholars believe that each of these churches were lead churches who possibly had hundreds of other churches in their network. So, you could infer that when Jesus addressed a letter to one of these churches, it would actually be received by all the churches under its leadership.

In any case you can infer that Jesus, in writing to the seven churches of Asia Minor, were representative of all the churches of their day. The **number seven speaks of completion**, it is the **COMPLETE PICTURE** of the church and the **COMPLETE ANSWER** for His church. And since His word is eternal, you can be sure that He is speaking through these letters to the church today.

Last week Pastor Josh spoke about the **church of Smyrna**. This was the church which endured much opposition and persecution from the Roman government. In fact, its beloved Pastor, Polycarp was martyred for his refusal to participate in Emperor Worship. Jesus commended this church and encouraged them to remain faithful, even to the point of death. Jesus **promised eternal rewards** for those who love Him and stay faithful to him in hard trials.

The Letter to the Church at Pergamum

Text: **Revelation 2:12-17** NASB

12 *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the **sharp two-edged sword** says this:*
13 *‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and **did not deny My faith** even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*
14 *But I have a few things against you, because you have there, some who **hold the teaching of Balaam**, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way **hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans**.*
16 *Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone, and a new name written on the stone** which no one knows but he who receives it.’*

Vs 12 *“to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:”*

***Where was Pergamum?** What was significant about this City?

Pergamum was the capital city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). It was also a **major center of Pagan Worship**. The Roman Empire embraced all forms of Pagan Worship. They believed that gods were behind every detail of life. **Pagan Worship** was considered essential to having a society that was blessed with **abundance, health, security, fertility** and **peace**. It was considered to be **unpatriotic** or **anti-social** to refuse to worship pagan gods. In fact, if you refused to worship pagan gods you were considered an **‘unbeliever’** and **apostate to the gods**. They believed this caused serious harm to the community if one refused to worship along with the pagan culture.

In addition to being a **major center of Pagan Worship**, Pergamum was also the **headquarters of the Proconsul (Governor) of Rome during the reign of Emperor Domitian**. This is noteworthy because another form of Paganism was the cult of **Emperor Worship**. Participation in the worship of pagan gods was considered somewhat voluntary, but the **official worship of the Emperor was mandatory** and **strictly enforced**. **Refusal to worship the Emperor and call him Lord, was an act of treason worthy of death**.

1- I Know Where You Live- I realize you live where Satan is operating.

13 *‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and **did not deny My faith** even in the **days of Antipas**, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

The Lord tells the church in Pergamum that He knows where they live all about their opposition they are facing. He is aware of all they are going through. **He commends them for staying faithful to him** in spite of one of their own believers (**Antipas**) who was martyred for his faith.

God knows everything about you. He knows who you are and all the challenges which you face!

2- Jesus – the One with the two-edged sword. *“The One who has the sharp two edged sword says this:”*

What does the two-edged sword signify?

Jesus was encouraging the Believers in Pergamum with this statement. He was telling them that **Rome did not have the ultimate authority of life and death**, but Him alone, the Righteous Judge.

Hebrews 4:12 *“For the **word of God is living and active** and **sharper than any two-edged sword**, and piercing as far as the division of **soul and spirit**, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the **thoughts and intentions** of the heart.”*

His word is not like a blunt instrument which does unnecessary damage. Instead, it is like a **Surgeon's scalpel** or in our modern medical field, an intensified and focused light, **which we call a laser**.

When a doctor does surgery to remove a malignant growth in a human body, the goal is to remove that which causes ill health to save the life or bring healing to the patient. **We should think of Jesus and God's word this way**. If we really study the word of God and get to know the heart of God, we will discover that God is the great healer and restorer to those who will allow Him to be Lord. But He is also one who will eventually slay those who are bent on doing evil.

Revelation 1:16b *"...and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...."*

The two-edged sword.

For those who choose to resist God and His ways, His word will eventually be one of destruction. This is where many people stumble at the idea of God being both a Savior and a Judge. How could He be a God of love and a Judge at the same time? But that is who our God is. We see this throughout the book of Revelation.

***We need to understand that God is Light.** Apostle John says in **1 John 1:5** *"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."*

This means that God is completely pure, moral and holy. There is no defect in Him. In fact later in Revelation we see Him worshiped at the throne by redeemed people and angels who cry out, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory.'" The Beauty of His Holiness is incredible.

In heaven there will be NOTHING unholy or unclean allowed to enter there. That's why it will be so glorious.

***We need to understand that God is love.** Everything He does and says is motivated by His great love. His love is so incredible, if we get a revelation of it, it will change our life. Jesus said it this way. **John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."*

Apostle Paul said it this way. **Romans 5:8** *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

When God's Light and Love converge, you have something powerful. **You have the Cross**. It is where Jesus had to shed His blood for mankind to have any hope of forgiveness and redemption. God loved us so much, He sent us Jesus, poured out His wrath on His own Son to die a horrible death in our place.

But His love also demands justice. Those who continually reject His salvation will eventually be judged.

3 - But I Have A Few Things Against You

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

***What was the teaching of Balaam?**

Balaam was a soothsayer or false prophet during the time of Moses and the Exodus. Balaam means (*Destroyer of the People*). He was hired by Balak the King of Moab to curse Israel. However, God used Balaam to bless Israel. Balaam knew that he couldn't curse Israel with his words because they were blessed of God. However, he knew that if he could entice them to involve themselves in the worship of Baal which included sexual relationships with the Moabite women, they would bring a curse upon themselves.

So Balaam taught Balak to have Moabite women go out and invite Israelite men to join them in Baal Worship (Numbers 25). Balak enticed the Israelites to do just that, bringing a curse on themselves. This brought a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites.

So the teaching of Balaam Jesus is referring to concerning the Church of Pergamum was that some of their number were compromising with the culture, eating things sacrificed to idols and committing acts of sexual immorality.

They were eating things they should not be eating. This is talking about more than just eating food. It refers to what they were feeding their souls upon.

In our culture, we don't have **Pagan Temples** per se. But we do have **every form of entertainment** which people **can be consumed by**. Some believers in Pergamum were feeding their souls on ungodly things which was leading them away from God. Today, much of media and in entertainment is saturated with ungodly themes.

Anything that takes your heart away from God or desensitizes you about sin should be something you stay away from. The worship of Baal led the Israelites into Sexual Immorality. They abandoned the sacredness of sex within the confines of marriage and began to indulge in sexual relationships outside of the Marriage Covenant.

During the early church, the Roman Culture was the dominant culture of the known world. The Roman Culture embraced every form of sexual vice known to man. It was considered normal for people to have many sex partners outside of marriage. Sexuality was not considered sacred but merely a casual activity.

The Modern day Church needs to give heed to what the Lord says about the issue of sexuality. God is the designer of sexuality and blesses it when it is treated as sacred within the confines of Marriage between one man and one woman. Any sexual activity outside of marriage is considered sinful by the Lord, regardless of what our modern culture says.

There is so much to this issue. There is not enough time today to go in depth except to say that if you are involved in sexual activity outside of marriage. Or if you are involved in pornography or anything that hinders your walk with the Lord, you need to turn away completely from it and put it out of your life for good.

The Lord gave a strong warning to those in Pergamum who were 'holding to this teaching.' It was wreaking havoc in the lives of the people who were involved in it. God desires His people to be set free to worship Him!

****Some were holding to the Teaching of the Nicolaitans. What was the teaching of the Nicolaitans?***

The Greek meaning of the Word: **Nikos** (*to conquer*) **Laos** (*the people*) to conquer the people.

This means the **teaching of the Nicolaitans conquered those who embraced and engaged in this teaching.**

Bible Scholars of early church writers tell us that Nicolas was one of the initial seven deacons which were selected by the Apostle (Acts 6). Later on, Nicholas began to adopt a worldview of Compromise. That one could worship the Lord AND engage in a sinful lifestyle because the grace of God covered all of it. This was the same reasoning the Serpent gave to Eve in the Garden of Eden. (You can eat of the tree which God commanded you not to eat, and in fact you will become more like God).

Does this sound familiar today? That its OK to live an immoral life AND still worship the Lord?

Missionary Pastor Rick Renner in his book 'A Light in the Darkness Vol II' comments on this very theme.

"In the Christian World today, there are emerging spiritual leaders who, like the Nicolaitans of the past seek a dangerous truce with the world under the guise of inclusiveness and compromise."

He describes modern signs of the Nicolaitan spirit working in the modern day church.

***Lack of emphasis on Holy Living** – Rather, it embraces all lifestyles as acceptable to God

***Lack of Sound Bible Doctrine** – Doctrine is not viewed as important, but making people feel good is

***Lack of Absolute truth** – Tolerance is the primary concern, saying that there are many paths to God

Those in the Body of Christ who adopt this view become subdued by human nature (the flesh) and by demonic spirits. People who were once on fire for Jesus begin to drift out of the church and lose their impact for Him. That is why the Lord hates this teaching. Because it weakens the lives of His people and leads to destruction. Jesus gave a stern warning to those who hold to this teaching or worldview.

4 – Jesus' call for His church to Repent of those teachings and practices

Repent, Metanoia: **Change of Mind and Heart, Will and Direction**

It means to completely change one's mind. It means to have a complete change of heart. It means a change of will. It means to stop doing what He calls you to stop doing. It means to start doing what He calls you to do. It means to live a lifestyle of continual change by the power of the Spirit.

Concerning Idolatry

In bible times, people would enter an actual temple and offer a sacrifice of some sort. An animal, sometimes a human sacrifice, or a monetary sacrifice to worship their 'god.' The idea was to curry a 'favor' from their 'god' so as to receive some kind of benefit. The only problem is that there are no other 'gods' who truly live. There is only the true and living God or demonic spirits who pose as 'gods.'

In the 21st century, in our western culture, we don't necessarily worship idols the way pagans did in bible times.

But, people today make 'gods' out of Money, Popularity, Houses, Possessions etc... Anything which we place before God is an idol. Even the good things God gives us can become an idol if we place it before Him.

Having an idol creates a stumbling block in your path. Stumbling leads to falling and in falling we get hurt. Anytime you put something before God, you're eventually going to get hurt and hurt others in the process. But, the biggest hurt caused is against the heart of God. He is hurt by our idolatry.

So, Jesus calls us to repent...have a change of mind or a change of heart about those things which can be an idol in our lives. He wants us to walk in freedom to worship Him!

Concerning immorality

To change your mind on how you view sexuality. Do you hold to the World's value system of right and wrong? Do you want to fit in with what pop culture says is ok? Or do you want to see deeper, to see that way God sees it? God created sexuality to be a wonderful gift within the confines of Marriage between one man and one woman. It is in this context that men and women are blessed and protected spiritually, emotionally and physically.

If you've been immersed in the pop culture, to follow God, you have to have a change of mind about it. You have to have a change of heart about it. And, most importantly you have to allow God to work in you that you will live a lifestyle of moral purity which pleases God and in turn, wonderfully heals your heart.

5- Jesus' Promises to the Overcomer *"To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone, and a new name written on the stone** which no one knows but he who receives it..."*

Hidden Manna

Manna always speaks of God's Miraculous provision and satisfaction. Hidden Manna signifies the satisfaction of personally being well cared for by the Lord. Like Jesus, you have 'food to eat' that others are unaware of.

White Stone with a New Name on it

Bible Scholars note many applications which a 'white stone' had in the first century. In his book "A Light in Darkness" Pastor Rick Renner gives these explanations.

***A Token of Admission: Tessara – A ticket** to an event like a public feast. Usually engraved with a number or phrase. These were collected upon admission to the event. This enabled you to be admitted to the feast! If you didn't have a White Stone 'ticket' you would not be admitted to the feast.

***A Token of Athletic Victory:** This 'white stone' would be a record of an Athlete's Achievements. Athletes were held in high esteem in that time like today. If they were an exceptional athlete they would receive a 'white stone' Authorization to receive a lifetime of benefits. (Like a Military Veteran has a Military I.D. Card)

***A Token of a Gladiators Retirement:** This 'white stone' would be a record of the Gladiator's Achievements. If he survived a long career as a Gladiator he would receive one. It would often have the letters SP engraved on it. It signified, Spectatus (*tested and proven*). It also was an Authorization to receive a lifetime of benefits. (Like a retirement pension.)

***A Token of a Vote of Exoneration:**

In a first century Roman Trial, a Panel of Judges would weigh the evidence and vote with a Black Stone to signify the Guilt of the accused. Or they would cast a vote with a white stone to signify the innocence of the accused.

***A Token as Invitation to a Wedding:** A white stone was given to people in the same way that we give invitations to a wedding. We send out beautiful invitations of the event for people to come and celebrate the joyous occasion. It is sent to you specifically with your name on it requesting the honor of your presence. Jesus promises to the overcomers that they will receive a '**White Stone**' with their '**new name**' on it. There is going to be the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:7-9

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'write, '**Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.**' And he said to me, 'these are the true words of God.'"*

Conclusion:

Jesus knows all about you, where you live and what you face in life

Jesus is the coming King with the **two-edged Sword of Salvation for His people** and **Judgment for His enemies**

He **raises issue with things** which aren't right in His people

*The spirit of compromise and ungodly lifestyles

He calls for **Repentance** (Change of Mind, Heart, Will and Direction) – consider the consequences

He promises a **personal invitation** and **Seat at the Table** for all who follow Him and are **Overcomers**