

7 Churches

The Impure Church

Revelation 2:12-17

January 29, 2017

HDBC

The book of Revelation recounts the fascinating vision brought to the apostle John from the Lord Himself. In the vision, we are able to see with great assurance the ultimate victory that will come. All that seems to wrong with God's good creation will be made right. All the heartache, pain and suffering will be brought to an end. The enemies of God will be vanquished forever and paradise will be restored. It's a great book of the Bible!

In chapters 2-3 we have personal messages to 7 churches in around Ephesus. Real churches with real challenges. But they are pictures of churches in all the generations which would follow them. These messages are in the Bible to for churches like ours. As we read these messages we are to see what adjustments we are to make as individual believers and as a church. The message to Pergamum is a message to HDBC.

Pergamum: **The Impure Church** (Note five things)

1. **The Church is Judged by Christ (12)**

Notice how Christ is described in the introduction to this letter.

The one who has the sharp two-edged sword.

The sword is the word of God. (Hebrews 4:12)

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

Because it is God's word it is true. It is powerful to instruct, to heal and restore. But also powerful to judge and destroy. His words are absolute authority. Everything is measured or judged against them.

Reminded of the scene in Revelation 19 when Jesus comes riding a white horse, with a sword coming out of his mouth. This is a picture of judgment

Note this sword is sharp and double-edged. Both of these speak of the effectiveness of this sword. It can do what it is designed to do.

It cuts and cures. It hurts and heals. It convicts and consoles.

2. The Church is Commended for Its Faithfulness (13)

This church lived in a city that was not friendly to Christians or the gospel. Opposition and persecution can make living for Christ a hard thing. This church was criticized for some failures. But first were commended for some victories. Note Jesus' words . . .

I know where you dwell. Not the word for a sojourner, but for homesteader.

Permanent residence. They were stuck in this situation. It was where they would be until Heaven. That may be where some of us are. Note how it is described.

Satan's Throne

A reflection to the idolatry and immorality that was pervasive in that city. Satan was alive and well in Pergamum. He had great authority and influence in that area. These believers were living behind enemy lines. Let me tell you a little about this city.

The City of Pergamum

It was considered by many to be the greatest city in Asia. Located 100 miles north of Ephesus. Roman writer Pliny called it "by far the most distinguished city in Asia."

When Alexander the Great died, one of his generals was given this city. He then gave it to the Roman empire around 133 B.C. It became the capital of that region.

It had no harbor, but was stationed on top of a large cone shaped hill about 1000 feet above the plain below. From its top you could see the Mediterranean Sea 15 miles away.

It hosted the second greatest library in the world, second only to Alexandria, in Egypt. 200,000 hand-written volumes, mostly on parchment. The governor of the region wanted to hire the librarian away from Alexandria. The Egyptian ruler heard about it and cut off all shipments of papyrus to Pergamum. They had to develop another type of paper to write on, they developed the use of animal skins, known as parchments.

Three Temples: 1) Temple to Zeus. 40 ft high. Continual sacrifices made. **2) Temple to living emperor.** It was the first city in Asia to receive permission to build a temple dedicated to the worship of a living emperor. **3) Temple to the god of healing** symbolized by the serpent entwined around a staff. This church had some serious challenges.

But they were faithful defenders of the faith. Refused to compromise with the enemy. They were faithful even to martyrdom. They held to His name and refused to deny the faith. Jesus even provides a specific illustration of their faithfulness.

Their faithfulness resulted in the martyrdom of one of their own. We know nothing about Antipas. He may have been their pastor. Tradition says he was roasted inside a brass bull during the reign of Domitian. **Jesus describes Antipas as his faithful witness.** That is **exactly how Jesus is described** in Revelation 1:5. Jesus honored the Father in His death. Antipas has now honored Jesus in his death.

This is happening right now somewhere in the world. Believers are being arrested and killed for their faith. The global war on Christians has never enjoyed a truce or a cease-fire. **Respected author and journalist, John Allen notes that *80% of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed against Christians.***

90% of all people killed for their faith are Christians.

100,000 Christian martyrs every year. 274 a day. 12 an hour. 1 every 5 minutes.

3. The Church is Criticized for Its Compromise (14-15)

Most were faithful. Some had even been killed for their faith. But others were compromising their faith. Some had given in to the pressures of the culture, causing the church to be weakened and sick. The compromise in this church was evident in two areas.

A. Beliefs

Some who hold to the teaching of Balaam. Balaam's story is found in Numbers 22-25. Jesus makes it clear that two sins resulted from the teaching of Balaam; idolatry which led to immorality. Because of the teaching of Balaam they celebrated and worshipped the idols of their culture

You also have some who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

We first learned of them in the letter to the church at Ephesus. That church rejected this teaching. This church embraced it. Pure speculation as to who these people were or to what they taught. Whatever it was, it was wrong.

B. Actions

Because they believed the wrong things they did wrong things. Their worship of the false gods, due to the teaching of Balaam led them to be involved in wrong practices. In Balaam's day they adopted the culture's practices in terms of their worship and their sexual immorality. Those two often go together.

If you worship the wrong god, you will almost certainly do the wrong things.

The same had happened to the church at Pergamum. They had compromised what they believed, which led to a compromise in what they did. What you believe impacts what you do.

But let me point out that what you do also impacts what you believe. I have seen it too many times. Once a person begins to compromise with sin they will often change what they believe. **Young couple believe what the Bible says about marriage.** It is for a lifetime. Only things that can dissolve it are abandonment by an unbeliever or adultery. Then one or both decide they just don't love each other anymore and get a divorce. *I thought you believed marriage was permanent?* They will often say they don't believe that any more.

God expects purity in his church. He only has a "few things" against them, but that was a few too many.

4. **The Church is Called to Repent (16)**

Short and direct. Repent. Do something! Stop letting it go on. Compromise is one of Satan's favorite and most effective tools. Here are some reasons why.

- 1) It never occurs suddenly. It happens over time and therefore is hardly noticed.
- 2) It always leads to a lowering of standards.
- 3) It is rarely offensive because it always signals tolerance and flexibility.

The end result is that we accept what we once rejected.

We embrace what was once repulsive.

Once the Holy Spirit points out that a church or an individual has compromised, the only remedy is severe repentance. **Those with ears, need to hear.** Pay attention!

Note the warning to those who refuse to repent.

I am coming to YOU, and I will make war against THEM.

This is a swift and severe response from the Lord Himself. Note that the weapon of war against them will be His word. His truth will defeat them.

5. **The Church is Encouraged by Its Future (17)**

The references to the **hidden manna** and to the **white stone** have led to a host of interpretations. Dozens of possibilities. Let me offer two things that this texts clearly reminds us of. In the future we have assurance that Christ will offer two things:

A. **Access**

I believe the **hidden manna** reminds us of our access to God through Christ. Recalls the wilderness experience. Jesus identified himself with the manna when he declared himself to be the bread of life. It is Christ in all His fullness.

Bowl of manna was placed before the Ark of Covenant, which was placed in the Holy of Holies. That was the hidden manna. Jesus will open that hidden place up and give us absolute unhindered access to the presence of God. .

B. Acceptance

There are a number of possible meanings of the **white stone** with the new personal, hidden name.

Reminds us of the 12 stones in the breastplate of the priest. Picture that acceptance before God was based upon the sacrificial work of the priest. If the priest did not do his work, the people were not accepted by God. Jesus is the ultimate high priest who has purchased our acceptance before God.

White stones were sometimes **given to the winners of athletic competitions**, with their names inscribed. These stones were then used as admission tickets to the special banquets to honor the victors. Once again, the idea is of acceptance.

White stones were **used by juries in voting to condemn or acquit** a defendant. White stone was a sign of acquittal. In Christ we have been set free from our sinful past and can then be accepted by Him.

The new name represents the new character of the person. Reminder that all that was of the old sin nature will be gone. All will be new, fresh and pure.

Takeaway . . .

This church was commended for its faithfulness. God notices our faithfulness and brags on us for it. But even while we are faithful, we may fail in some other areas.

This church was criticized for not maintaining purity in its theology and its morality. What caused this? Compromise with the culture.

What leads a church to being commended for faithfulness?

Faithful members.

What leads a church to be criticized for a lack of purity in doctrine and practice?

Members who accept false doctrine and immoral practices.

It always comes back to individuals.