

The Seven Churches of Revelation
Revelation 2:12-17
“Pergamum: The Compromising Church”

Introduction

Have you ever had someone do you wrong, and then offer up a half-hearted apology for it? You know what I mean, the old “If I have done anything to offend you, then I’m sorry” line. Don’t you just HATE that? “If I have done anything” ...sounds like they are really saying, “If you weren’t so easily offended, then we wouldn’t be in this mess to begin with!” A true apology will admit EXACTLY what wrongs were done. No excuses. Just, I’m so sorry that I said that or did that. What I’m trying to say here is that a sincere apology will be specific about any wrongs that were committed. Do you ever think that Jesus gets tired of our half-hearted confessions? How many times do we pray, “Lord, please forgive ‘all my sins’?” We think that sounds so spiritual, but I wonder what Christ thinks? A sincere prayer for forgiveness should be pretty specific about just what needs to be forgiven, don’t you think? How about, “Lord, I never should have watched that television show with its filthy language and sexual innuendo.” Or, “Lord, I shouldn’t have been flirting with that girl at work, when I have a wife and kids waiting for me at home.” Or, “Lord, I’m sorry that I took your name in vain yesterday and made that obscene gesture when the guy cut me off in traffic.” I believe that Jesus would like to hear a SINCERE and SPECIFIC apology from us now and again don’t you? As a matter of fact, I think that being open and honest with Him about our failures is the only way that we can get past them. So, keep that in mind the next time you are tempted to pray some vague prayer that “sort of” confesses some vague sins that you may, or may not, have committed. Get real and honest with God about who you really are, and what you really did, and see if He doesn’t keep his promise to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

The bottom line is simple. Jesus KNOWS your heart. You cannot fool Him with hypocritical spirituality. He can see right through all of that. That is why John describes Him to us as having **“eyes like blazing fire” (Rev. 1:14)**. When Jesus speaks to each of His seven churches in *Revelation*, He introduces Himself in a unique and specific way at the beginning of each letter. This is because He knows exactly what they need to hear from Him. He addresses them based on their specific needs. To the church of Ephesus He is, **“The One Who holds His pastors accountable and judges the church” (2:1)**. To the Church of Smyrna, He is **“The One Who has suffered and overcame” (vs. 2:8)**, and to the Church at Pergamum, He is **“The One whose Word is a sharp two-edged sword” (2:12)**. Ephesus had forgotten to revere Him. Smyrna was suffering like Him, and Pergamum had begun to neglect His Holy Word. He reminded them that His Word was like a sharp two-edged sword, and that they had better take His commands more seriously, or He would judge them by His Word. You see, when Jesus examines one of His churches, He can instantly see exactly where they are going astray. He offers a specific course correction and gives warning of the consequences of impenitence. Pergamum had made compromises with the world, and although they had withstood serious persecutions (their pastor Antipas was roasted alive in a bronze bull because he would not worship Caesar - **vs. 13**), they had begun to let sinful things creep into their fellowship. If Satan cannot devour us as a “Roaring Lion” (**1 Peter 5:8**), then oft times, he will slither in as a snake. Simply put, if he cannot defeat the church by force, he will attempt to bring it down by the enticements of sin. A church that is willing to compromise God’s Word is a church destined for extinction, for **“without holiness, no one will see The LORD” (Hebrews 12:14)**. Pergamum had gone from being a holy and shining example of Christianity, to a church that was willing to strike a bargain with the devil. As a result, swift judgement was on its way to Pergamum.

Jesus began His letter by saying that He was well aware that Satan had set up his headquarters in Pergamum (**vs. 13**). The throne that Jesus referred to was most likely a massive altar that sat atop a hillside in Pergamum in honor of the greek god Zeus. That altar can best be described as a massive portico shaped like a horseshoe. The structure measured 120 by 112 feet with an 18 foot high podium at its center. Adolf Hitler, who was fascinated by the occult, had the altar of Zeus at Pergamum dismantled and rebuilt in a museum in Nazi Germany. He also had a replica made for himself to give speeches to his adoring crowds at Nuremberg. Hitler wanted this podium built, because it would make him appear

godlike as he stood high above the crowds and shouted his “commandments” to the people. A very similar podium was constructed at “mile high” stadium in Denver for Barak Obama to address the crowds when he received the Democratic nomination for president. Needless to say, the “Throne of Satan” is apparently alive and well, as he worms his way into the politics of this sinful world. Churches that allow him a foothold will soon find him seated upon the “throne” of their lives. Christ warns His Church at Pergamum that they must choose wisely Who should rule over them. They must choose to Revere The Word, Reject The World, in order to Receive The White Stone.

THE WORD

The Word of God is described in scripture as a sharp two-edged sword separating soul and spirit, joint and marrow (**Hebrews 4:12**). Simply put, this means that the Word of God can cut us to pieces. It will either cut us to the heart and make us want to repent, or it will condemn us to death. Jesus has been given ALL authority to judge out lives. He is The Chief Cornerstone. Any who will fall upon Him and be broken will find life, but those on whom His judgment falls will be crushed (**Matthew 21:44**). Although not everyone in Pergamum was living in sinful compromise, they were allowing many of their members to do so unimpeded. Judgement begins in the house of God (**1 Peter 4:17**). If the Church is unwilling to rebuke and chastise its own, then how can it ever hope to reach a lost and dying world with the message of truth and righteousness? A church that is willing to compromise the Word of God in order to increase its membership will bring judgment upon itself. Paul warned us that in the last days people would not be willing to put up with sound doctrine, and that they would surround themselves with teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear (**2 Timothy 4:3**). Sounds a lot like what is going on in America today doesn't it. It seems like we are constantly hearing about some new doctrine that waters down the truth of God's Word in an attempt to make it more palatable to the “masses”. News Flash... God's Word was Never intended to be “palatable” to the masses. Rather, it is meant to convict the few who have “ears to hear”, who will turn away from their sins and find forgiveness and healing. In short, Jesus has always known that the road to destruction is broad, and the “gateway” into His kingdom is narrow (**Matthew 7:13**).

As a church, we should never compromise God's Word just to pump up our numbers. Here at Freedom, we want to strive for a Church built upon the foundational rock of Christ. We believe that the three things we need in order to keep ourselves focused are Prayer, TEACHING, and Love. We are convinced that if we focus upon these things then we will remain on course. Will we ever become the largest church in all of Greene County? I doubt that, but why not just focus upon being the one that accurately holds to the teachings of scripture above all else? I don't know about you, but I can live with that! I believe that Jesus will honor us for that as well. The Church at Pergamum had mistakenly believed it better to be more “inclusive” of sinfulness in order to grow. But the growth that they experienced was more cancerous than spiritual. It doesn't matter how big you are, if you're dying. You'll still be just as dead in the end. NEVER compromise The Word of God. It is far better to allow it to change your heart now, than to have it condemn you for all eternity.

THE WORLD

Jesus condemns the Church of Pergamum for its tolerance of false doctrines, which include: Nicolaitanism (**vs.15**), which we have previously discussed as a sect that taught that worldliness was perfectly acceptable for the believer, because it was covered by grace; as well as, the doctrine of Balaam (**vs. 14**). Balaam (pronounced *Bil-awm*) was an *Old Testament* “false prophet/sorcerer for hire” (**Numbers 22-24**), who was willing to put curses upon the enemies of others, provided the price was right. Balak was a Moabite king who was terrified of the Israelites. He hired Balaam to pronounce a curse upon them, but every time the old soothsayer attempted to do so, God would put words in his mouth that blessed the people instead. This, of course, infuriated Balak, as well as, worried Balaam, for he feared that not only might he not get paid, but he just might find himself beheaded for his futile attempts to curse

God's chosen people! After multiple tries at cursing Israel, one of which was foiled by his now famous talking donkey (whom I've often wondered as to whether or not it sounded like Eddie Murphy), Balaam resorted to another strategy. If he could not curse the Israelites, then he would come up with a plan to get God to do it. He advised Balak to send some of his most beautiful Moabite women into the camp to seduce the Israelites, offering themselves to the young men of Israel in exchange for the worship of their Moabite gods. Balaam knew that if enough Israelites would fall for the trick, that God Himself would have to severely punish the people and possibly even destroy them entirely. The plan eventually backfired, but God did end up sending a plague upon Israel that wiped out 24,000 people before the nation fell to its knees in repentance (***Numbers 25:1-9***).

The doctrine of Balaam was forever remembered as Satan's way of deceiving God's people to engage in sexual immorality, so that God would have no choice but to punish them severely in order that He remain true to His Word, as well as, His holiness. This was exactly what the devil was doing at Pergamum. He had failed in his efforts to persecute the church out of existence. The martyrdom of Antipas had only served to strengthen the Church's resolve. Enter plan "B". False teachers who would sound so spiritual, but would seduce the less spiritually grounded believers into destroying themselves by engaging in sexual immorality. If Christ did not intervene, the church would be forever lost. Between the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the perversions of Balaam finding its way into the church pews, Pergamum was on a slippery slope that would lead to its downfall. Jesus warns the immoral among the church to repent or face the consequences. He would come and judge them according to The Word of God, and they most certainly would not be able to stand in the face of such judgement! When God decides to judge our sins according to His Word, we don't stand a chance. Do not give the devil a foothold in your life, or he will place a throne there. That is what sin does. It cannot be "managed" or "controlled", for it spreads like a wildfire out of control and will eventually consume everything in its path. The sinful pleasures of this world have no place within the Church of God. We are commanded to come out from among the heathen and be separate (***2 Corinthians 6:17***). We are God's holy people. A worldly church will soon be a dead church.

Examine your own hearts according to the standards of God's Word today. Is there anything in your life that doesn't belong there? Have you allowed the devil to seduce you into immorality. It usually starts with something that seems small, a TV comedy that makes light of promiscuity and perversion, or a relationship at the office that just seems "friendly" at first, but then grows into something more. Please understand, the devil doesn't try to tempt you to sin because he feels sorry for your uneventful life! He tempts us so that he can eventually destroy us (***James 1:13-15***). Satan is not your friend. He will do anything within his power to bring down the Church of Jesus Christ. If he cannot do it as a roaring lion, he will slither in like a snake. Devote yourself to the study of and obedience to God's Word, so you will not give in to the devil's schemes of worldly pleasure.

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in *The Bible*. It is located in the center of your *Bible*, and it is all ABOUT *The Bible*! It has been placed there by God so we would know of the importance of choosing The WORD above The WORLD. One of my favorite verses in all of scripture is ***Psalms 119:165***. It reads, ***"Great peace, have they that love thy law, and NOTHING shall offend them" (KJV)***. Jesus is calling us to choose his Word above this World. He promises that if we live according to His commands, we will not stumble into darkness (***Psalms 119:105***). Choose The WORD and not The WORLD, and He will give you a ***"White Stone with a new name" (vs. 17)***!

THE WHITE STONE

In the first century, the olympic games were becoming a widely celebrated event in all of Rome. People would go to great lengths to purchase a seat at the games. In those days, there were no printed tickets, but rather, to each one who had purchased entry into the arena a white stone was given as proof of their admission price. Jesus uses this familiar concept as a promise to those at Pergamum, who would choose to follow after His commands and reject the enticements of this world. He promised the over-comers a "white stone" with a new name written upon it. This is simply His promise that those who will faithfully follow Him will have admission to His Kingdom paid for by His own blood, and not only that, but

He will give us a “new name” as well. A new name is Biblical language for a person being forever changed. When Saul met Jesus on the Damascus road, his name was changed to “Paul”. When Jacob wrestled with Jesus all night at the Brook of Jabbok, his name was changed to “Israel”. When Simon made his profession of faith in Christ, his name became “Peter”. Jesus has promised us that if we obey His commandments, He will **“love us and reveal Himself to us” (John 14:21)**. This simply means that if we choose to love and follow Christ by faith, then we will have an “encounter” with him just as Jacob, Peter, and Paul did. An encounter with Jesus changed those men forever, and it will change us as well. We will enter into the gates of Heaven with a “new name”, forever changed in the presence of God. I heard an old preacher say one time, “If your religion hasn't changed you, then you need to change your religion!” Jesus is in the name changing business. As we walk with Him and obey His commands, we will be given a new nature. **Old things are passed away, and all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17)**. Have you had your “name changed” this morning?

Jesus also promises **“hidden Manna” (vs. 17)** to those who overcome. This is simply a reference to His provision for our lives. Following Christ will give you a completely fulfilled life. The world cannot understand how we, as Christians, are filled with joy, even though we don't partake of the sinful pleasures of this life. They simply do not get it (**1 Peter 4:3-5**). One day they will be judged for the sins that they have committed, and then they will understand, but it will be too late. Jesus assured the Church at Pergamum (and us as well) that those who are wise enough to obey his commands will be completely satisfied. Are you completely satisfied this today? How is your obedience? There is a reason that Christ has promised those who love and obey Him will live an **“abundant life” (John 10:10)**. Many people feel sorry for us poor “evangelicals”, because we have to miss out on all the “fun” (as they would call it), but someone who has been forever changed by the saving grace of God, knows something that they can not know. Sin is no longer “fun” for us! We have a new nature. We have a new NAME! Has there been a time that you surrendered your life to Christ? Are you living an abundant life, filled with the joy of knowing Him? Is He more than enough to satisfy your every longing? Choose to follow His WORD. Turn away from the pleasures of This WORLD and receive your WHITE STONE engraved with your new name and be guaranteed access to The Kingdom of God. You will NEVER regret your decision!

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!