

REVELATION 2:12-17

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Revelation chapter 2 as we continue our study through the book of Revelation and the Word of God!

As I have said before, we are in the second division of this book or as Jesus said in John 1:19, “**. . . the things which are . . .**” This second division covers Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

These are letter’s that Jesus wrote to specific churches that were in existence in John’s day and Jesus writes seven letters to these churches that were located in the Roman Province of Asia Minor or the western part of modern-day Turkey.

Seven is the number of completeness and I think that is the reason for the seven letters. And, obviously, there were more than seven churches located in this region, but these seven churches represent the things that were going on in John’s day, and they also speak to us as individuals as well as seeing them portrayed throughout church history.

Look at what we have seen so far.

There was the letter to the church in Ephesus or – ***THE LOVELESS CHURCH!*** This church, historically speaking, went from the birth of the church until around 63 A. D.

We next looked at the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Smyrna or – ***THE PERSECUTED CHURCH!*** This church historically speaking, went from 63 A. D. to 312 A. D. and during this period of time 5 to 6 million Christians were put to death for their faith by Rome!

This evening we are going to be looking at the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Pergamos or – ***THE COMPROMISING CHURCH!***

And we will deal more with this as we read through this letter but keep in mind that the timeframe here is 312 A. D. to 590 A. D.

But let me share this with you and you will see where we will be going.

We are told,

Long ago, William Law warned that the world is now a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in apostolic times:

It is a greater enemy, because it has greater power over Christians by its favors, riches, honors, rewards, and protection than it had by the fire and fury of its persecutors.

It is a more dangerous enemy, by having lost its appearance of enmity. Its outward profession of Christianity makes it no longer considered as an enemy, and therefore the people are easily persuaded to resign themselves up to be governed and directed by it.

- Robert H. Lauer

How true that is. Anytime the church is a friend of the world the church loses out and we see that today!

Also, as we have done with the other letters we have studied so far, we will look at the seven key principles of each letter: the *destination*, the *title* or *description of Jesus*, the *commendation* except for Laodicea, the *rebuke* except for Smyrna and Philadelphia, the *exhortation*, the *warning* except for Smyrna and Philadelphia, and the *promise* that Jesus gives to those who will listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to them and apply it to their lives.

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Revelation chapter 2, beginning in verse 12 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word and this letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Pergamos.

REVELATION 2**VERSE 12**

First of all, let's start out with the *destination* of this letter.

Jesus wrote this letter to the church of Pergamos and specifically to the pastor of the church of Pergamos.

The reason that Jesus wrote to the pastor in the church in Pergamos is simple. He is the one who is leading the people of God and thus, he will share with his people what God is showing Him. Now, let's look at this city called Pergamos for a moment and see what this city was all about.

The city of Pergamos was located about 100 miles north of Ephesus and about 75 miles to the north of Smyrna and about 15 miles inland.

Thus, it was not a seaport city, nor did it have any major trade routes going through it, which meant it never attained the commercial greatness of some of the other cities, like Ephesus and Smyrna.

Then what drew the people to Pergamos?

One of the reasons was that Pergamos was the political capital of the Roman Province of Asia Minor.

Culturally speaking they had a library that contained more than 200,000 parchment scrolls, second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt!

In other words, Pergamos was known for its political influence, its cultural influence and its education.

But it did not end there; they were like the other cities that did not know the true and living God!

What do I mean by that?

Like the other cities, the city of Pergamos worshiped many gods. In fact, according to Greek mythology, Pergamos was the birthplace of Zeus. Thus, they had a temple to the god Zeus plus temples to the other three main deities of the Greco-Roman world: Athena, Asclepius, and Dionysus.

But the god that overshadowed all the other gods was Caesar. This city became the center for Emperor worship, as this was not just a once-a-year time of worship of these Emperors'.

You see, elsewhere Christians were in danger of not burning incense, bowing the knee and saying "*Caesar is lord*" once a year, but here in Pergamos they were in danger every day!

We also see this god known as Asclepius, and he was the god of healing and knowledge. Its symbol was two entwined serpents, a symbol that the medical industry still uses today, but notice its pagan origins.

At the temple to this god was a medical school and many flocked to this temple to be healed.

Of this Barclay tells us,

Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple. In the temple there were tame snakes. In the night the sufferer might be touched by one of these tame and harmless snakes as it glided over the ground on which they lay. The touch of the snake was held to be the touch of god himself, and the touch was held to bring health and healing.

- William Barclay

We laugh at that today but look at what people do to be healed of all kinds of things. We are no different today.

There was also this magnificent altar of Zeus that dominated Pergamos' acropolis. It was huge, some 120 feet by 112 feet and 18 feet high.

They loved their gods, and they had many and they had the temples to worship them in.

Of this city, the Roman writer Pliny called it, "*by far the most distinguished city in Asia.*"

And as dark as things were, the Gospel of Jesus Christ came bursting onto the scene dispelling that darkness that they were in.

Now the big question is, "*How did the light of the Gospel burst forth into this city?*"

The book of Acts does not tell us nor do the epistles. But most likely the church was founded during Paul's ministry in Ephesus, maybe taken to Pergamos by converts and the light of the Gospel burst into this dark city transforming people's lives, taking them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light!

The city of Pergamos is still around today but it is called Bergama, it is a Turkish city.

As we read on, we come to the *title* or the *description of Jesus* that He takes out of Revelation 1:16. And what He says to this church is that Jesus is "**He who has the sharp two-edged sword.**"

Please keep in mind that this is not a positive picture of Jesus or one that is encouraging to the church there in Pergamos. This is a threatening picture.

I guess threatening if you are not obeying the Lord, and many were not in this church!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

“It is the first negative introduction of Christ because the church in Pergamos faced imminent judgment. Disaster loomed on the horizon for this worldly church; it was and is but a short step from compromising with the world to forsaking God altogether and facing His wrath.”

Now as you read that description that Jesus is using you may be wondering, ***“Why would Jesus use that description of Himself when He wrote to the church of Pergamos?”***

Because the church of Pergamos was known as the ***Compromising Church!***

How did this happen? What does this mean?

Let me explain.

Interestingly enough the name **“Pergamos”** means ***“mixed-marriage”*** and the idea here is that the church was united with or married to the world.

Again, how did that happen?

What does that mean?

First of all, ***historically*** speaking, the church became more like the world, they were what we might call ***“Seeker-friendly”*** but in being Seeker-friendly they became more like the world and moved away from their relationship with God.

They did not have healthy doctrine anymore but watered it down to be accepted by those around them, the unsaved.

Thus, they compromised their faith to be liked!

What an important lesson for us to learn.

Let’s face it, the unsaved won’t like us because we are believers. They didn’t like Jesus and they won’t like us either!

The thing is that we must be careful and not let that cause us to compromise our faith but stand strong in the faith that has been entrusted to us!

Remember what Jude said in Jude 1:3, **“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”**

You see, not compromise but to contend for the faith that has been entrusted to us! It is a battle!

Now, *prophetically* speaking, we have seen the church of Ephesus represent the apostolic church or the church of the first century, to around 63 A. D. This is the church that left their first love, Jesus Christ. They had all the work, all the motion for the Lord, but there was no relationship with Him, no emotion towards Him.

Then we came to the church of Smyrna that represented the persecuted church from around 63 A. D. to around 312 A. D. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ some 5 to 6 million Christians were put to death for their faith by Rome.

Now we come to the church of Pergamos that represents the compromising church that began around 312 A. D. and lasted into the 5th century, to around 590 A. D.!

Now, the big question is, ***“What happened in around 312 A. D. that changed things for the church?”***

In 312 A. D. the last emperor to persecute Christians died and now there was a power play for the right to be Emperor between Maxentius and Constantine.

And one of the generals who was fighting for this position, Constantine, prayed the night before the big battle, or so the story goes, and he prayed that if God would give him the victory he would convert to Christianity.

And, according to legend, he saw a flaming cross in the heavens, and he heard a voice speaking to him and saying, "*In this sign conquer.*" He then fell on his knees and prayed, what could he lose!

And from what we are told in history, Constantine was outnumbered, and he saw this large group of people who were not joining in this battle, for either side.

Guess who they were?

They were the Christians and thus, when he said that he too was a Christian they joined forces with him and with this huge army he gained the victory.

But again, I don't believe he was a Christian and you will see a few reasons why I feel this way in a minute.

Now, in defeating Maxentius in this battle, it made Constantine the new Roman Emperor!

Then, in 313 A. D. Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted religious freedom for Christians.

That sounds great, after some two and a half centuries of intense persecution, violent deaths; this is all going to stop as Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

Folks, this was not good.

To be politically correct, to not offend anyone, heathen priests became Christian priests.

The heathen temples became Christian churches.

The heathen feasts became Christian festivals.

And everyone was happy, even the Devil, because what persecution could not do in over 200 years, weaken the church; this marriage to the world, this compromise did!

Thus, Christianity began to decline as they attempted to combine Christian theology and pagan philosophy. And this was just a stepping-stone leading up to the corrupted church of the dark ages and the church of Thyatira, which we will look at next time.

Let me share some things that Constantine did, and you will see how it will play into what the Roman Catholic Church is all about.

First of all, Constantine assumed the headship of the Church and his title – *PONTIFEX MAXIMUS* or the Supreme High Priest! It is what the Roman Catholics call their Pope!

Also, Constantine Christianized paganism and took with it its practices and holidays!

Let me show you what I mean.

First of all, there is Christmas. The pagan festival was Saturnalia or the Winter Solstice festival that took place from December 21st to the 26th each year. And it was celebrated with mistletoe, yule logs, and they decorated evergreen trees! Should sound familiar, it is what is practiced today!

Then there is Easter. The pagan festival is the festival of Ashtarte or the fertility goddess. This festival was celebrated in the Spring and they celebrated it with rabbits and colored eggs. Again, it should sound familiar because it is what is practiced today!

And the problem here is that the pagan temples were turned into Christian churches and Constantine allowed the pagan priests to become Christian priests.

Like I have said, the church married the state, and it was not a good thing!

Donald Gray Barnhouse put it like this,

Imagine the whispering that went on around Rome - the Emperor had become a Christian.

Out of the catacombs they came. Instead of being persecuted, they found themselves popular.

Like a youngster among heavy drinkers, the church's head was turned by the wine of the world.

The priests of the pagan temples had been paid from the purse of the Empire, but now Caesar was a Christian and the priests of Mars and Venus hastened to their baptisms.

For the first time in the history of the Church, salaries were paid to Christian workers.

Tradition has it that Constantine's mother was the first to give the money for the erection of a church building. Before, kitchens and catacombs, humble dwellings or humbler dungeons had echoed with the quiet hymns of the believers whose songs of praise were frequently changed to the shout of the martyr as the believers were dragged forth to the arena.

All this was over now. The rags of persecution gave way to softer garments, and the Church began to enjoy the feel of silk upon its flesh.

Thus . . . the Church was married to the world.

- Donald Gray Barnhouse

Remember what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 6:14-18, **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.’”**

Notice that we are not to be yoked together with the world and yet, that is what we see here, the church and the world were united together for the destruction of the church!

The Lord has called us to come out not to join with them, may we listen and obey!

In saying all that, let me get back to the *description of Jesus*, the one who is holding a **“sharp two-edged sword.”**

Folks, this is not the *MACHARIA* in the Greek, or a small dagger or sword that is used in hand-to-hand combat.

This *MACHARIA* is spoken of in Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12 and it speaks of the Word of God, our sword of the Spirit!

But that is not the word that Jesus uses here.

In Revelation chapter 2 Jesus uses the Greek word *RHOMPHAIA* for sword and it is the broadsword, the one that you see Conan the Barbarian swinging to cut his enemies down.

For Jesus, this *RHOMPHAIA* is also the Word of God and it is with the Word of God that His judgment will cut down those that try to unite themselves with the world.

Yes, the persecution against Christians was coming to an end, but they were faced with an even bigger problem. You see, the Judge of Heaven and Earth was about to judge them for their compromise!

One last point before we move on.

I think you can clearly see that we see this happening at an alarming rate today as the church is trying to unite with the world, to be more tolerant as they now tolerate all kinds of evil, they have compromised their faith.

But why are they doing this?

So they will be liked!

But God didn't like it back then, this compromise, and He still doesn't like it today!

VERSE 13

Make no mistake about it, Jesus is aware of everything that we are doing, whether good or bad, just like we see here with the church in Pergamos.

Here, in the midst of this darkness, this compromise, we see a faithful witness by the name of Antipas. We don't know anything more of this man than what we read here but again, Jesus sees what Antipas was doing and did do and the Lord is commending him for it!

Yes, even in the midst of darkness, in churches where God's Word is not being taught, there can be faithful believers who love the Lord, not many, but there may be a few.

And, like I have said, we see here the *commendation* that Jesus gives to this church, to these faithful believers, and it is a two-fold commendation.

And I want to drive this point home that no matter what you are going through, how difficult life may be, the all-knowing God is fully aware of what is happening, not only in this church, but in this world, every detail, even in our own lives and He not only sees what we are doing but He knows the motivation of a person's heart for what they are doing!

Look at these points that they held on to.

First of all, they held to the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is God!

Do you realize today there are many so-called Christians who deny this truth?

Folks, you cannot be a Christian and deny the deity of Jesus Christ, it doesn't work like that.

But with these true believers, they will not compromise their faith, they not only believed in the deity of Jesus, but they also proclaimed it! These believers stood strong and so should we!

Secondly, they stood strong in the faith.

That is what Jude was admonishing his readers and us to do as he wrote, "**Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**" Jude 1:3.

Now think about this. The persecution that once came from the state against the church is now coming from the church against these Bible believing saints, and yet they stood strong.

I believe we are beginning to see this in our day where the church itself is coming against those believers who believe the Word of God is the Word of God, from Genesis through Revelation.

They are coming against those who believe that Jesus is God and the only way to the Father, to heaven.

Folks, they are coming against you and me!

What should we do?

Stand strong in the faith that has been entrusted to us, it is not time to give up or to play dead! It is not time to compromise our faith!

And yes, during this time the persecution against Christians was coming to an end, at least by the government, by Rome, but now the conflict was coming from the church itself!

As I have said, there was a man named Antipas who was put to death for his faith in Jesus Christ, and I believe that the false church put him to death!

The reason I say that is because the text says that Antipas, “**... was killed among you, where Satan dwells.**” Revelation 2:13.

Did you catch that?

He was killed in the church or by the church, “**where Satan dwells.**”

Antipas may have been one of the good leaders in the church of Pergamos and tradition tells us that he was roasted to death inside a brass bull!

And Jesus, as He commends this man, He speaks of him being a martyr. When we think of that word what comes to mind is being put to death for your faith in Jesus. But that is not what the word meant, but it is what it has come to mean.

William Barclay put it like this. He wrote, “***Martus* is a most interesting and suggestive word. In classical Greek *martus* never means a *martyr* in our sense of the term. It always means a *witness*. A *martus* was one who said: ‘This is true, and I know it.’ It is not until New Testament times that *martus* ever means *martyr*.”**

When you think about it, not only in your life but also in your death you are a witness of Jesus, or at least we should be. And Antipas was.

Interestingly enough his name means, *“to stand alone.”*

And he did stand-alone for his faith; most of the church had compromised their faith and were behind the death of this believer. And maybe in the leadership role, he stood alone as the others were compromising their faith and teaching it to the people.

Can that happen? It already is folks!

Just look at any church that is married to the state and you see that happen.

And folks, even in this country, we don't see true believers being put to death, but we are called the enemy by those that call themselves Christians and the reason we are the enemy is because we believe the Word of God and we believe the Lord is coming back for His Bride, the Church and He will come back to set up His Kingdom on this earth seven years later, after the Tribulation Period.

And think about this for a minute. When the church in general was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity, the true believers were being persecuted for their faith!

Now we have to deal with a couple of interesting points that Jesus brings up, but He does not go into detail regarding what they mean.

He speaks of Pergamos, the place they lived, as being the place **“where Satan's throne is”** and Antipas was killed **“where Satan dwells.”**

What in the world does that mean?

Now before I share with you what I believe Jesus is speaking of, let me say that Satan is not king over Hell – but one day he will be a captive there like those who have rejected Jesus.

You see, the Bible tells us that he is the god of this age, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

Now I do realize that does not help us to understand what Jesus was saying here, but for some, it does help clear up the idea of where Satan is at and what he is doing.

Now, what about this idea of, “**where Satan’s throne is**” and “**where Satan dwells**”?

Let me explain it like this.

Back in Genesis chapters 10 and 11 we see the story of a man named Nimrod and the tower of Babel, which was the start of the false religious system in the area of Babylon.

Then, by the time we get to the book of Daniel we see the rise of the Babylonian Empire and within this empire were magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, they were heavy into the occult. In fact, it was the center of occult worship, the center of this false religion.

But the Babylonian kingdom came to an end and it was replaced with the Medo-Persian Empire.

Now, here’s the thing. What happened to these priests from Babylon who were into this occult activity?

They moved their headquarters from Babylon to Pergamos, they were just assimilated into the Medo-Persian Empire and continued with their practices.

That is why Jesus called Pergamos the place “**where Satan’s throne is**” and “**where Satan dwells.**” It was the center of false religious activity and now the church was married to them! In fact, it seems to say that the church had become the place where Satan’s throne is and where he dwells!

Do we see evidence for this?

You bet we do – look at the Christian holidays we celebrate, like Christmas and Easter, they have pagan roots. Now we celebrate the birth and the death and resurrection of Jesus because they did take place. And we use this time to not only encourage believers but to witness to unbelievers because if they come to church, those will be the two times a year that they do come.

I know some freak out about having church on these days, but I can have church even on Halloween because I am worshiping the Lord and not a day!

Also, look at some of the practices in the church, like the worship of statues and praying to the dead.

Yes, Satan's throne was in Pergamos, but it would eventually move to Rome, and we will look at that more next time as we look at the church of Thyatira as these priests moved from Babylon, to Pergamos and then to Rome because a lot of these false practices came out of Pergamos, the place where Satan dwells!

VERSES 14-15

Here we see that the Lord who knows and sees all, *rebukes* them for their error, which was two-fold.

The first thing Jesus had against them was that they were following the doctrine of Balaam.

You can read on your own the story of Balaam in Numbers chapters 22 through 24 but let me give you a quick overview of this man and what he did because Jesus rebukes this church for following his ways.

Balaam was a pagan diviner or prophet from Pethor, a city of Mesopotamia.

We don't know why, some say he was a believer, I don't think so, he could have been, but his actions don't seem to prove that, but God did speak to this prophet and his fame spread.

Balak was the King of Moab and he too was aware of Balaam's abilities and he wants them to be used against the children of Israel.

Balak was afraid of the children of Israel who were encamped in the plains of Moab. He had heard how God gave them great victories over their enemies and thus, he wants Balaam to curse the Israelites.

God told Balaam not to go but because of greed, he was going to get paid a good wage for this, Balaam pressed on and God said that he could go but only speak the words that He was going to put in his mouth.

And each time Balaam tried to curse the children of Israel, he blessed them, and the King was not happy. He kept moving Balaam around and telling him to try again, but to no avail, each time a blessing came forth!

Now Balaam was in trouble here, he was going to lose out on a large sum of money, so he found a way to accomplish this by using a back door approach. He was not going to curse the children of Israel just as God had said to him, but he would give to the King a plan where the children of Israel would turn against God, which would accomplish the same thing.

God would judge them for their sin.

And make no mistake about it, his plan was a good one.

He told the King of Moab, Balak, to gather their younger women, make them wear those short skirts, put on lots of make-up, jewelry, to dress seductively is the idea, and then entice these young Hebrew men.

How would that make God angry?

Because when they did this, they would also show them how they worshiped their gods, which was done with sexual activity.

Thus, two points here with this doctrine of Balaam – they committed sexual sin and they committed spiritual fornication before God and thus God judged them!

How did this work?

It worked like a charm.

In Numbers 25:1-3 we are told, **“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.”**

Thus, Balaam caused the people of God to intermarry with the world when they were to be married to God.

That was the doctrine of Balaam and Jesus is telling us that this same doctrine is going on in Pergamos. Just as Balaam introduced idolatry and fornication to the children of Israel, Constantine introduced idolatry and fornication into the church and for this church, they allowed it in under the guise of toleration and openness and it was their downfall!

Please understand that as the church we are to be in the world, but we are not to be of the world.

I used this illustration many times before, but it does drive home the point, so I will use it again.

A boat needs to be in the water to function, out of the water it can't do much.

But when you place that boat into the water, it runs beautifully.

The problem comes not when the boat is in the water, but when the water gets into the boat, then it is sunk.

The same is true for us as Christians. We need to be in the world to function, isolating ourselves on some island is of no use. But when we are in the world we can function and do the things that God has called us to do.

The problem comes when we allow the world to get into us and then we too are sunk!

And it all begins with compromise. A little here and a little there and before you know it, you are like the last days church, the church of Laodicea and Jesus is outside the church knocking to get in. That is how far away you can go with just a little compromise!

What I see happening today is that many in the church are becoming part of the world and thus, their light is going out, their lifestyles are no different than the unsaved. You can't mix light and darkness folks.

If you don't think this is a problem, if you think I am going overboard on this issue, then look at what happened to the children of Israel as they followed the doctrine of Balaam and listen to the warning that God gave to the church in Pergamos, the Judge of all the earth has spoken, we need to be listening!

The second *rebuke* against this church is that they held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

Remember the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus, it said that they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

Now the church is not only following their deeds, but the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. Now the church is embracing that which the Lord hates!

As I said when we studied the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus a few weeks back, I believe this relates to a hierarchical system of lording over the people, of having a priesthood that is superior to the people.

Why do I say that?

Because the way this word can be broken down into its two root words: **NIKAO** means “*to conquer*” and **LAOS** means “*the people.*”

Thus, the idea is to conquer or rule over the people.

Folks, we are all sinners that have been saved by grace, saved by Jesus. Some don't have more access to God than others but we as believers can approach the throne of God and speak to Him, we don't have to go through any mediator except Jesus Christ. God hates it and yet we still see it around today!

Remember that Jesus is writing to the leader in the church of Pergamos and thus, this leader is giving the people what they want to hear, he is tickling their ears!

And we again see this today.

When a shepherd is more concerned about earthly comfort and pleasures than the eternal future of his flock, that is dangerous!

When a shepherd encourages his flock to follow their own lusts, whether it is greed, sexual or otherwise, the building up of self and not the crucifying of the flesh, that is dangerous!

And because of what the shepherd has taught them, not from the Word of God but the words and ideas of men, the flock is more concerned about satisfying their own fleshly desires than receiving spiritual blessing!

Thus, the Word of God is watered down, it is not important, and we have Bible studies that center around a book rather than ***THE BOOK – THE BIBLE!***

Compromise is a slippery slope to be on because it will take you farther and farther away from God!

Let me share this with you.

In the New Testament we see that the Christians in Pergamos, not all of them, but many of them, were like the Christians in Corinth. Compromise led to carnality!

Listen to what we are told in I Corinthians 5:1-8 and you will see what I mean. We are told, **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”**

They were so loving, or so they thought, that they allowed sexual sin to be accepted in the church.

And we see that even today where sin is tolerated. We see the acceptance of homosexuality, transgenderism, fornication, adultery and the likes and the reason being is they are accepting of all, and when I say “*all*” I mean all sin! Not a good thing and Paul rebuked the Corinthian church and Jesus is rebuking the church in Pergamos.

Don’t glory in allowing sin into the church, purge it out before it affects the lives of everyone in the church! This was not done in Pergamos and we will see how farther down, away from God the church will go as we get to the letter Jesus wrote to the church in Thyatira!

And yes, when difficulty comes it is easier to compromise but it does not make it right, it does not justify it. We don’t join with the world to do the work of God; He does not need their help!

VERSE 16

Here we see Jesus give to this church in Pergamos an *exhortation*, which is very simple – ***REPENT!***

Why make it complicated when it is not complicated at all!

They were not told that they have to crawl on their hands and knees to some shrine.

They were not told that they have to light some candles or burn some incense.

They were not told that they have to do this or do that.

They were told that they needed to repent or to do a 180-degree turn back to God and away from sin.

If they refused to do that, then Jesus gives them a *warning*. In fact, He says, “**Or else!**”

When Jesus says that you need to listen, He is not joking!

You see, there are only two choices you have here, get right with God or He will judge you according to His Word.

And keep in mind that Jesus is talking primarily against the phonies that had infiltrated the church in Pergamos.

In a sense, they were the “**mixed multitude**” that loved the world, and the reason that they loved the world is that they were still of the world!

Remember that these are the *tares* among the *wheat*, the *counterfeits* among the *genuine*.

Now in saying that it does not mean that we are never to repent of our sins as Christians. Of course we are. We can't lose our salvation but our sins hinder our relationship with God, and these counterfeits were not saved at all!

In John 12:47-48 Jesus said, “**And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.**”

Folks, it is time for the church of God to get back to the Word of God, not to water it down, not to make it seeker friendly, but to speak forth the Word of God and allow the Spirit of God to convince, rebuke, exhort, convict and-so-on so that people can get saved, so people can grow in the Lord.

You see, I know for a fact that God knows what we need in our life. And folks, this is not “*Let's make a deal!*”

You need to repent and get right, or His judgment will come, and it is the Word of God that will judge you for your sin!

VERSE 17

In each of these seven letters Jesus tells them that if they have ears, and they all did, then they needed to hear what the Spirit is saying. And these letters were to be read in all seven churches and beyond, as we are doing today.

Again, not complicated, the call is simple. Hear what the Spirit is saying, not to close your ears to His voice but to hear and obey.

And for those that do hear and obey He gives them a two-fold *promise*.

First Jesus tells them that He will give them hidden manna to eat.

This is the bread from heaven that God fed the children of Israel with during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It was the bread that sustained them on their journey.

How does this relate to us?

In John 6:32-35 we are told, **“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, give us this bread always.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’”**

Jesus is the bread of life and so is His Word.

Remember what we were told back in John 1:1, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**

Thus, as we feed upon the Word of God, as we partake of God’s Word into our life, we are taking in Jesus into our life, we are learning of Him and growing in Him.

It is He who sustains us and gives us what we need to grow by!

And remember, Jesus says that this is for those that overcome, what does that mean?

We are overcomers by our faith in Jesus Christ and Paul tells us, “**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**” Romans 10:17.

Then Jesus speaks of a second **promise** He will give to those who overcome, a white stone with a new name written on it.

What is that white stone all about?

There are many ideas out there and I will share with you what I believe this white stone represents.

I believe that this white stone is a stone of acceptance into the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, the black stone was the stone of rejection into the kingdom of God. We even have that phrase that a person is “***blackballed***”, or they are rejected.

Now, how are we accepted into the kingdom of God?

By asking Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, not by works or doing this or doing that. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone!

Folks, the world can't give you everlasting life, only Jesus can. Thus, don't go looking to the world for your answers to your spiritual needs, look to Jesus the giver and sustainer of life!

Now this new name that Jesus gives to us, I believe, will sum up who we are, our character, that which God sees in us and we might not see. My pet name for my wife is “***Sunshine***” and I have been calling her that for some forty plus years. I think that is the idea here.

Remember the example of Jacob in the Old Testament. His name meant “***heal-catcher***” because he was a schemer.

But God changed his name to Israel or **“governed by God”** or **“ruled by God.”** Thus, this new name that God has for us will fit us perfectly, not because we can see it in us, but that He can like He saw in Jacob or should I say Israel!

And look at what Jesus says about this new name given to us and written on this stone. It will be given to us as we enter into heaven and this new name will be so personal that only the person who receives it will know what it is! He has a new name for each of us!

I like the way that author Mark Hitchcock put it. He had this to say about what he believes this white stone is. He wrote,

It was common in that day for a ticket to the theater, a special banquet, or some other event to be issued in the form of a white stone with a person’s name on it. These stones admitted the bearer to the event . . . I believe that given the context, which speaks of eating the hidden manna, the reference to an admission ticket to the future Messianic banquet makes the most sense. Every believer will receive his or her special ticket to the messianic feast with a new name written on it that no one knows but the individual and the Lord.

- Mark Hitchcock

Think of Jesus putting it like this to the people at the church in Pergamos and to people today. ***“If you repent, if you turn away from paganism, if you turn away from compromise, if you don’t look to the world for your help and think that everyone is saved, then I will give to you a white stone. What that means is that you are no longer guilty, but you are victorious, you have been accepted into the Kingdom of God because you have come to Me. Welcome into heaven!”***

I like that!

As I close this evening, keep in mind that for over 200 years the church was strong in the faith, they were pure. They knew what they believed in and they were willing to die for it.

Now the persecuted church has come out of the catacombs, the persecution has stopped, and the church has married the world, and they have become impure.

What a warning to us not to go down that same path because the righteous Judge is watching, and He wants us to partake of Him and look to Him and not the world for our answers.

For church history prophetically speaking, what is ahead for them are the dark ages unless they repent and allow the light of God to shine upon their darkened hearts!

And that is true for us as individuals, if you refuse to listen to Him, you will walk in darkness and not the light.

The choice is yours, but you know what God wants you to do, to come to Him and receive that everlasting life, and walk in the light as He is in the light!

This is not a time to be wishy-washy in our faith, it's not a time to be friends with the world. It is a time to stand up like Antipas did in his day and say, ***"I don't care what it costs me, I will be faithful to my Lord until the end. I will finish the race strong, no matter what it may cost me!"***