

Pergamos – The Compromised Church

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

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April 21, 2024

Text: Revelation 2:12-17

Purpose: The church at Pergamos did many things right. They remained faithful in the midst of their circumstances. They held true to their convictions. They held on to their faith to the point of death. But they also had some that compromised their faith and allowed the worlds way to enter in.

I came across this story this week and I wanted to share it with you.



This man entered Wal-Mart and was standing in line to purchase 2 large bags of dog food. He was about to check out when a woman behind me asked him if he had a dog. His first thought was, “What did she think I had - an elephant?”

Since he had little else to do, on impulse, he told her that no he didn't have a dog. He was starting the Purina Diet again. He told her that he probably shouldn't do it again because the last time he was on this diet, he ended up in the hospital. He did share with her that on the bright side, he had lost 50 pounds before he woke up in an intensive care ward with tubes coming out of every hole in his body and IVs in both arms.

He told her that it was essentially a perfect diet and the way it works is to load your pockets with Purina nuggets and simply eat one or two every time you feel hungry and that the food is nutritionally complete so he was going to give it a try again.

(By this time, everyone in the check out line was enthralled with the man's story.)

Horrified, the woman asked if he ended up in intensive care because the dog food had poisoned him. He told her, "No; I had stopped in the middle of the parking lot to scratch a few fleas and a car hit me."

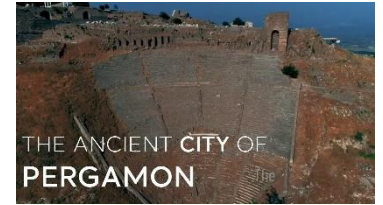
The man reported that the guy behind her was going to have a heart attack, he was laughing so hard. Now, Wal-Mart won't let him shop there anymore. ¹



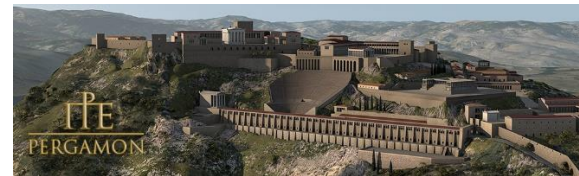
We may laugh at this woman who was so gullible. But sometimes aren't we gullible with some things as well? Aren't we gullible when it comes to allowing things into our life that seem innocent enough, but over time, they actually suck us in and have us completely in their grip?

Pergamos was such a city. If you were to look at the church today, you will find some doctrines and practices have crept into our midst that are not found anywhere in scripture. Jesus describes the city of Pergamos as the "City of Satan."

Pergamos – The City of Satan

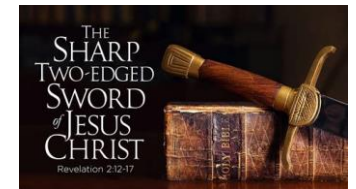


David Jeremiah, in his book, "Escape the Coming Night," tells us about this city. ² It was the most northern of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation. It became the capital city for the Roman government in Asia. By the time this letter was written by John, this capital city of Asia had been around for almost 400 years.



Sir William Ramsey who visited the location where all seven of the churches mentioned in The Book of Revelation said this: "Beyond all cities in Asia minor, it gives the traveler the impression of a royal city, the home of authority. The rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain so proudly and so boldly." The library of Pergamos was second only to the library at Alexandria, Egypt. This was a city of government and learning.

When Jesus introduces himself to the church at Pergamos, he calls himself, "*He who has the sharp two-edged sword.*" This reference goes back to Revelation 1:16. Christ is ready to use this sword if necessary if this church does not repent.



Jesus looks at the church and identifies three positive things about the church, but mentions one that if not addressed would result in judgment. You may think, three out of four is not very bad. It is a 75% passing grade.

But if you went to the doctor and he said you had three good things, but the one thing that was bad was enough to cause you to die, then you would wake up and pay attention.

The Circumstances of the Church at Pergamos

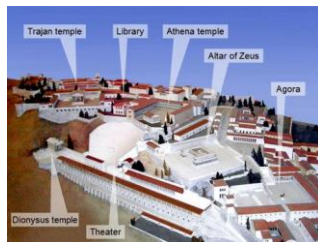


Jesus begins by telling those at Pergamos that he knows how difficult it is to remain faithful under the circumstance they are under. After all, Jesus said the

city they live in contained the “Throne of Satan.” From a spiritual standpoint, Pergamos probably was one of the worst cities of the seven mentioned in Revelation.

According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, the statue of Zeus was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It sat on the side of a mountain, 90 feet square and rose 40 feet into the air. As you approached the city, it looked like a throne. On that altar, many sacrifices were offered.

In Pergamos, there were four temples built. In addition to Zeus, there were ones dedicated to Dionysus, Athena, and Asklepios. The god known as Asklepios was known as the “god of healing.” The temples built there to



the god Ascklepios were the nearest thing to hospitals in the ancient world. The temple was referred to as *Ascklepios Soter* or “Ascklepios the Savior.” The image of a snake coiled around a rod was the emblem of Ascklepios. This is the same symbol associated with doctors and pharmacists today.

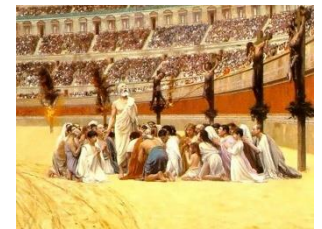


Some have suggested that when Babylon fell, the center of satanic activity on earth moved to Pergamos. This town was spiritually a very dark city, and Jesus understood the circumstances the Christians faced there.

Today, as you listen to the radio or television, you may sense a deep darkness has fallen across our land today. The things that once were mentioned in darkness are now being flaunted in the open. The things that once were considered immoral and illegal, are now being promoted as normal and healthy – alternative lifestyle, choice, and entertainment. Do not fear, the Lord knows our circumstances and is watching how faithful we are in the midst of a society that is getting darker each day.

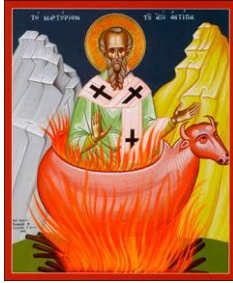
The Conviction of their Faith

Jesus also knew the believers there in Pergamos had a strong conviction for their faith. Even though they faced ridicule or even death, they remained faithful. Under the umbrella of civic religion, each person had to participate in the rituals of the city, otherwise they faced punishment. To live in Pergamos as a follower of Jesus Christ must have been difficult.



The Demonstration of Courage

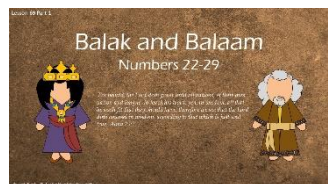
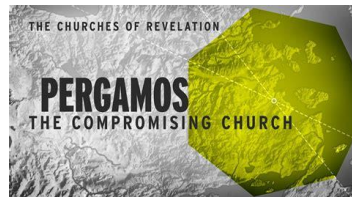
To live there and remain faithful demonstrated their courage. Jesus even called one Martyr by name, Antipas. His name has not been recorded in any secular history book, but the scripture describes him as the “faithful witness.” In the ancient church to be a witness and a martyr were almost the same thing. Sometimes we think we are a witness for Christ if we simply tell our family, neighbor, or stranger about Jesus. But how many of us have had to put our life on the line in order to be called a witness? That is a test I don’t want to have to face, but if confronted, I believe I would stand with Christ, even if it cost me my life.



Jesus has commended the believers at Pergamos for their circumstances, conviction, and their courage. But Jesus knows that some have compromised their faith.

Some Compromised their Faith

Of the two churches we examined earlier, the church at Ephesus was admonished for leaving their first love. The church at Pergamos was being admonished because they have weakened the church due to compromise. This was the same strategy that Balaam used against Israel.

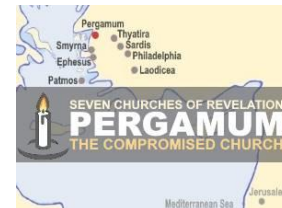


For you to fully understand this passage in Revelation, you need to go back to the book of Numbers, chapters 22-29. You will find a man by the name of Balaam that profited

from being able to get favors granted from various gods. Balak, the king of Moab, came to Balaam and asked Balaam to curse the people of Israel for a price. As the king and Balaam were standing on a hill overlooking the people of Israel, every time Balaam opened his mouth to begin to curse the people of Israel, only words of praise would come out.

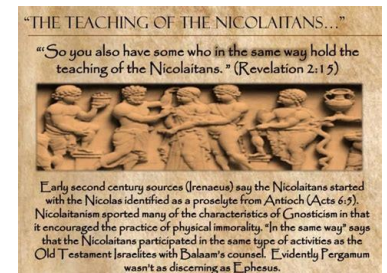
God would not let Balaam curse His chosen people. Since Balaam could not verbally curse the people, he told the king of Moab how to corrupt the people. He sent prostitutes into the camp of Israel and the men compromised their faith and took part in sacrifices and committed sexual immorality with these women. A plague broke out in the camp of Israel and 24,000 Israelites died as a result of God’s judgment.

Balaam’s doctrine was, “If you can’t curse them, corrupt them.”



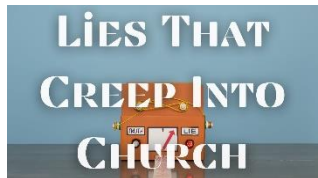
Apparently in the church at Pergamos, there were individuals who indulged in the pagan practices around them and thought there wasn’t any harm to their own faith. They compromised their faith and allowed the world’s system and the world view to warp their commitment to Christ.

Jesus also mentioned a second group called the Nicolaitans. We encountered this group when we examined Ephesus. As I mentioned two weeks ago, one theory suggests, they wanted to



form two classes of church members; those that were the priests and those that were the laity. They were destroying the unity of the body of Christ and substituting the way it was in the pagan temples.

Another theory suggests since the Nicolaitans were closely tied with the story of Balaam's doctrine that corrupted the people of Israel, they accepted many of the Gnostic teachings (secret knowledge) and they encouraged physical immorality. They also believed our physical lives were separate from our spiritual lives. While Ephesus rejected this teaching, some at Pergamos embraced it.



The world was creeping into the church at Pergamos and now Jesus was ready to hold the church accountable.

David Jeremiah said this about Pergamos. "The sin of Pergamum was the toleration of evil. Worldly standards had crept into their fellowship. Today it's the same worldly spirit within the church which makes it difficult to distinguish between the actions of Christians and the lifestyles of non-Christians. When those who call themselves Christians commit adultery, cheat in business, or lower their moral standards to suit the situation, they fit into the Pergamum mentality."

Jesus told them to clean up their mess or He was going to do it Himself. Jesus has the sword of righteousness to administer justice. We often forget that.

The Promise for those Delivered

There was a promise to those that recognized their error and returned to a pure pathway of life. *"Straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it."* Matthew 7:13-14



Jesus promised them "hidden manna." The Israelites lived in the wilderness on manna that fell from heaven everyday. They went out and collected their daily bread and then came home and ate it. They even collected a pot full and placed it in the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder of God's provision for them.



Christ is saying to that church, do not sit down at the table of pagans and feed from their table. Instead, trust Christ and His provision – that provision that comes down from heaven.

He also said he would give them a white stone, upon which a name was written that only the believer would know. Of all the symbols in the Book of Revelation, this one is very difficult to interpret. During the time the Book of Revelation was written, juries would use white stones and black stones to cast votes of guilt (black) or innocence (white).



It could also represent white stones that individuals would wear around their neck, maybe a good luck charm. On those stones, the name of their god would be written.

Whatever the meaning of those white stones, it is clear to me that you don't need to compromise your faith, no matter what the competition is doing, no matter what your neighbor is doing, and no matter what your family is doing. You are to remain faithful in all your activities.

The Problems of Pergamos Lived Out in History

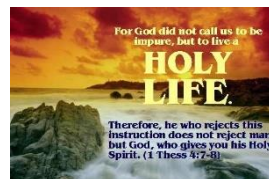
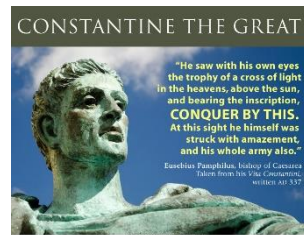
If you remember when we started this study, I mentioned that each church could also represent a different church age. The church of Ephesus represented the apostolic age of the church. The church at Smyrna represented the persecuted church under the various emperors of Rome. The church at Pergamos represents the church age where Constantine gained control of the Empire.

In 324 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of the entire Empire. Now there was a marriage of the church and state. Now Christianity was being forced upon everyone.

Pagan temples now became Christian churches. Pagan statutes became Christian icons. Pagan priests now became ministers in the new churches. Pagan holidays became Christian holidays. Even today, 1700 years later, Christmas, Easter, All Saints Day, all have some of their roots based upon some pagan holidays. The world entered the church with the blessings of the Emperor.

What does this have to do with us today?

We need to examine our lives and see if we are living according to God's word. Are we examples of holiness, honesty,



purity? Or have we allowed the world's standards of "what ever is best for ME" or "What ever is in MY best interest" or "It is okay as long as consenting adults agree."

We need to make sure we are not becoming a stumbling block to others around us.

- Is your language leading others around you to sin?
- Are the places you are visiting on the internet polluting and corrupting your mind?
- Are the items you are buying at the store demonstrating a good moral example?
- Is what you eat or drink wholesome or is it leading others astray?
- Are you intentionally or unintentionally leading your family and friends along the path of destruction?
- Or are you leading your family and friends in the paths of righteousness?

We need to be careful to whom we bow our knee. If we remain faithful and overcomes, we too will be able to eat from that hidden manna and be given a white stone with a new name written on it.



May we be found faithful in these last days.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mickey's Funnies, July 8, 2009.

² Outline taken from "Escape the Coming Night" by David Jeremiah