

Today we continue our study in Jesus' letters to seven churches, kept for us in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Today we study the 3rd letter:

Revelation 2:12-17

Jesus said: Write to the announcer for the church in the city named PERGAMUM:

[quote]

My sword has two sharp edges. I tell you:

¹³ I know where you live. In your city, Satan [devil] has his throne. But you still hold My name. Satan lives in your city, and his people killed My good witness *[announcer]* named ANTIPAS. But you still trust Me. You don't give-up.

¹⁴ But I have against you a few things *[list]*:

First, in your church, you have people, they follow a teacher named BALAAM. You know long-ago he taught one King named BALAK: how-to tempt people in Israel to-do sin against God. Food they offered for idol worship -- yes, Israel joined and ate that. Israel also joined their sexual sins.

¹⁵ Second, in your church, you have people, they follow teachers named NICOLAITANS.

¹⁶ Now change your hearts and change your actions. If you refuse, soon I will come to you. I will fight against them using My sword that comes-out from My mouth.

¹⁷ My Holy Spirit now speaks to your churches. Every person must pay-attention. Every person that wins, I will give-you MANNA, that's hidden. Also, I will give-you a stone: small, white STONE. Your new name, I will write on that stone. What new name? Each person only receiving that name will know.

One-week-ago we learned about a church that suffered much persecution.

They stood strong on God's word.
They worshipped only Christ,
and they refused to worship false gods.

And for that, they got discrimination and persecution.
And Jesus gave them much praise.

The church we study today, PERGAMUM,
also got much persecution.

Jesus said,

"In your city, Satan [devil] has his throne."

That means the devil reigns in that city. How?

First, many people are deeply involved-in the OCCULT,
and they worship idols.

Second, people are deeply involved-in sexual pleasure sins.

If people rebel against God,
obey the devil, swallowing his lies and his temptations,
people give the devil real power in their lives,
and he has control.

Then the devil confuses their minds,
and he influences their behavior [actions].

One church leader, named ANTIPAS, stood for Christ.
Jesus named that man, *"My good WITNESS."*

A good WITNESS does what?

He tells the TRUTH.

ANTIPAS did exactly that. He told the truth about Christ.
And for that, he got killed.

Interesting information:

The Greek language word for WITNESS is what?

"MARTYR."

In our English language, that word MARTYR means what?

A person that gets killed for his faith.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He said:

"You will become My WITNESSES."

"You will become My MARTYRS."

Gulp!

ANTIPAS, through his death,
gave strong WITNESS to Christ.

Through his death,
he gave strong encouragement to other Christians
to-stand for Christ.

If we get persecution,
it is important that we get persecution
for the right reason.

Why do people reject us?

Because we love and obey Christ?????

Or do people reject us, because they see in us a bad attitude?

Pride

Hypocrite

Selfish

??

Jesus praises the church in PERGAMUM because
in their persecution,
they still trusted Him.

But.... BUT!

They didn't trust Him with all their heart.

You see, the church in Pergamum had two problems.

The first problem is outside the church,
their suffering persecution.

The second problem is inside the church.

Christian life and the world's culture often have conflict.

Christian people can respond [answer] in two wrong ways.

First, people mix God's law with their man-made laws,
remove God's Grace,
and teach LEGALISM.

For them, the Christian faith is only a religion having many rules,
same-as PHARISEES in the Bible.

That way they try to protect themselves against the world.

But they invent religion depending on works.

Wrong.

The opposite answer to the world is also wrong,
meaning, the church gives-up God's True Word,
and Christians accept any idea the world offers.

And that happened in PERGAMUM.

And here Jesus says,

"I have against you a few things [list]:

*In your church, you have people, they follow a teacher
named BALAAM."*

Who is that?

Here Jesus pulls-up a name from Old Testament Jewish history,
1,500 years before.

Israel escaped from Egypt,
then they came near the promised land.

They traveled through the country named MOAB.

The King in Moab, named BALAK,
tried to hire a prophet named BALAAM
and pay the prophet to curse Israel.

The prophet tried,
but God stopped him,
and God told the prophet to bless Israel.
That made the king very angry.

So the prophet told the king,
Moab could destroy Israel, how?
The Moab women tempted Israel's men
to sexual sin and worship idols.

Jesus saw the same happening in the church.
Some Christian people in church
wanted to mix God's Word
with religious ideas from the world.
Christians wanted to worship Jesus
and worship Satan, both!

Shocking?
Christian people today still do that,
mixing Jesus with other
religions
philosophy
New Age
occult
Wicca [witchcraft]
astrology
reincarnation

Also, Christians in PERGAMUM wanted Jesus to forgive them,
but they didn't-want to give-up their pleasure in sexual sin.
They wanted to change God's Word,
to fit [match] their life STYLE [way].

And that still happens today.

Many people today, name themselves "Christians,"
thinking that they can
keep their Savior, and
keep their sin, both.

Many preachers today try to change God's Word,
making their church fit [match] in the world.

Today, if people discuss about the Bible and social ISSUES,
we find people have four different views about the Bible:

[1] What the Bible says,
the Bible means that,
and what the Bible says and means is true.
[group on one side]

[2] What the Bible says,
the Bible means that,
but what the Bible says and means is not true.
[group on the other side]

Then two groups in the middle:

[3] What the Bible says,
the Bible doesn't mean that.
The Bible means only what I want.

[4] What the Bible says doesn't-matter,
because no one can really understand
what the Bible means.

It is very sad that many "Christian" pastors
accept that 3rd and 4th view,
same-as the church in Pergamum.

Jesus has one word for them, the same word He tells us:
"REPENT"
With His help, change our heart, change our actions.

Another group in the PERGAMUM church,
that had wrong teaching,
Their group had the name NICOLAITANS.

Jesus said,
*"I hate their teaching, and
I hate their actions."* [Rev. 2:6 & 15]

That group, the NICOLAITANS,
they taught what?
They did what?

We really don't-know. The Bible doesn't say.
It-is-possible that group taught the same-as BALAAM:
mixing religion and philosophy from the world
in church teaching,
and accepting sexual IMMORALITY in church life.

What that group, the NICOLAITANS, taught
really is not necessary for us to know.
We learn to recognize [notice] error, how?
Not in studying error,
but in studying the truth.
Same-as a person working in bank
quickly recognizes fake money,
Not because they study fake money.
No, their hands are always touching good money.
So if they touch fake money, they quickly know,
that doesn't feel right,
that doesn't look right.

Same for us, if we learn and know God' Truth,
we can easily notice any teaching that wanders-away.
If we know what God says,
we can know what they say is-not right.

The first church in our study, EPHESUS, did that,
and they rejected false teachers.
But the Pergamum church were-not careful,
and they accepted false teachers.

Jesus said [quote],
*"I will fight against them
using My sword
that comes-out from My mouth."*

That sword means what? His Word!
His true and powerful Word.

Now we arrive to the close of this letter.
Jesus ends all seven letters with a promise in picture language.

Jesus said:
*"Every person that wins, will give-you two things.
First, I will give you MANNA, that's hidden."*

Remember what MANNA means: That special bread from
heaven that Israel ate for 40 years in the dry country between
Egypt and their promised land.

Jesus also names Himself as our MANNA, our bread from heaven
that gives us life forever. We receive Jesus Himself, hidden in our
bread with the Lord's Supper. And Jesus promises that in the
future, in heaven, we will feast with Him.

For Jesus' second blessing gift, He says:

*"I will give-you a stone: small, white STONE.
Your new name I will write on that stone."*

That stone means what?

Honestly, we really don't-know.

Here is one interesting guess:

Long ago, in Greek law courts, a small white stone means a vote for dismissal [sign = "lay-off"], meaning, "Not guilty!"

[source: Concordia Self-Study Bible, p. 1949]

Jesus Himself accepted all our guilt on His cross. He became guilty instead-of us. Now He says to us, "You are not guilty!" And then He gives us that small white stone, with our new name.

What new name?

In the Bible we often see people, that God changes their names.

ABRAM became ABRAHAM.

JACOB became ISRAEL.

SIMON became PETER.

SAUL became PAUL.

And what is your new name? We will see... [up-there!]

We pray:

Father in heaven,

Please make us strong in Your Word.

Help us never mix your Word with

other religions and ideas from the World.

Help us keep our hearts attentive to You.

Thank You for forgiving all our sins,

and for naming us, "Not Guilty!"

Thank You for naming us Your children.

Amen

Letter #3 - Pergamum