

Christ's Last Word to His Church SERIES: PERGAMUM: When Believers Compromise Christ's Call to Personal Holiness Revelation 2:12-17

As we open to Revelation 2:12-17 this morning, remember that Revelation 1-3 is all about:

Slide-1: Seeing Jesus Gathering With His Local Churches

Jesus wants us to know He is walking among us and watching our lives.

The simple message Jesus Christ gives us is that His Highest Priority right now is gathering with His local church. Remember where John first saw Jesus in Revelation 1:12? He was walking around His local churches (that is what v. 20 says that those lampstands represent: Christ's local churches).

That means that He is right now watching us. He is walking around His gathered Church looking to see if we are being and doing what He left for us to be and do.

Notice that Christ walks about His Local Churches, places when people gathered in a recognizable community. Christ's Church is His priority, it is where He is spending His time. The first message of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is that the local Church is His PRIORITY, it is where He goes, what He does, and where He is at work in the world today.

When Jesus toured His local churches He names seven of them, using seven local, geographic gatherings of believers. He describes each assembly and uses His assessment of these local churches to challenge all of the churches. This morning we are going to learn about:

Slide-2: When Jesus Visits His Church #3 at Pergamum

*Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 **"I know your works,** and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 **But I have a few things against you,** because you have there those who hold the doctrine of*

*Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 **Repent, or else** I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."*

Pray

The letters Christ wrote to the seven churches are for us lessons in living for Him at the end of days. What is the lesson Christ teaches us from this church at Pergamum? It is simply:

Slide-3: The Danger of The Compromised Christian

The lesson for all of us living at the end of days is that there is a danger of becoming a compromised Christian. What exactly is a compromised Christian?

God's Word teaches us that believers are compromised when they are no longer distinctively Christ-like.

Believers in Pergamum had gotten so comfortable around the deadly germs of worldliness that they began to exhibit the symptoms of friendship with the world. They were no longer distinctively Christ-like.

Believers at Pergamum had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world that displeased God. They lived just like all the pagans around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of friendship with the world and draw near to God.

We find here in Rev. 2:12-17 **Christ's second expectation of His Church**. Jesus says to this church that to please God as His Children they must separate from sin.

Do you remember the common theme we see in five of the seven churches? They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them to stay away from sin, thus they were not pleasing Him.

Slide-4: Pergamum's Lesson: To Please God Separate From Sin

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's

ministry of the Word to them? Remember, God's Word is God speaking to us.

When we read the Word or hear it preached, taught, expounded upon and explained it is hearing God declare what His desires are for us as His people. This leads us to Paul's very clear teachings about:

Slide-5: The Disobedience of the Compromised Christian

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 (NKJV) 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."** 17 Therefore **"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."** 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

First note that Paul reminds us of six powerful truths about who we really are in Christ.

These are the reasons why we have such a high level of expectation placed upon us by the Lord. First, as we look at v. 16 we can watch as Paul reminds them that: 1). We are the **"Temple of God"**; and not just any God, but Paul reminds us that 2). We are the **"Temple of the Living God"**.

Then Paul begins quoting rapid-fire and merging three separate verses [Lev. 26:12 + Jeremiah 32:38 + Ezekiel 37:27] into one verse (v. 17); and in that amazing verse reminds us that we are 3). **God's dwelling place**; and that 4). He **walks among us**; and 5). He is **our God**; and finally that 6). **We are His people**.

Then comes His high calling and very life-transforming desire for each of us in v. 17 onward. Listen again to those words again, only this time in light of who Paul has reminded us that we are:

v. 17 Therefore **"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."** 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Paul reminds us that God always desires that we constantly repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

But now comes the most amazing truth, one that jumps from the pages of Scripture

when we remind ourselves of the address of this letter.

Where was Christ's letter sent? To the city of: Pergamum. What is the lesson we are to understand from that fact? Here is the powerful truth:

Slide-6: God Can Grow A Church Anywhere

This letter was targeted to one group of people. They lived in a specific historic, geographic, and cultural area.

Here is what a study Bible would tell you about Pergamum:

"Pergamum (modern Bergama) was built on a 1,000-foot hill in a broad, fertile plain about 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It had served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor for over 250 years.

It was an important religious center for the pagan cults of Athena, Asklepios, Dionysius (or Bacchus, the god of drunkenness), and Zeus. It was the first city in Asia to build a temple to Caesar (29 b.c.) and became the capital of the cult of Caesar worship."¹

That short entry wouldn't really get our attention until we unpack just exactly what it means.

There are three items in that description:

Slide-7: Geography, History, Culture

Slide-8: Geography: Beautiful

It's Geography: Pergamum was a beautifully built city, about 80 miles north of Smyrna, about 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, and built on a hill 1000 feet above the lush green and very fertile valleys of Asia Minor.

Slide-9: History: Ancient

It's History: Pergamum was an ancient city. In 95 AD as John wrote it was an old city, it had been the capital of Asia Minor for almost 300 years.

Slide-10: Culture: Academic

¹ MacArthur Study Bible, in loc.

It's Culture: Pergamum was a university town (with the largest library in the ancient world rivaling with Alexandria), with about 200,000 volumes. In fact, Pergamum was noted for the production and use of parchment (boiled animal skins) that books were written on.

Slide-11: WHAT AN AWFUL PLACE TO LIVE FOR JESUS

Why was Pergamum such a difficult place to live for Christ? Because it was much like most college towns—a place of very powerful temptations.

Satan always wants to neutralize and derail believers from walking in the light and living out Christ's truth!

Slide-12: Reputation: exciting city

Pergamum was both an exciting place to live and an exciting place to visit-- it was a very sacred city to pagans city. This city was noted for the worship of three gods of the pagan pantheon of gods. These were:

Slide-13: Dionysus: God of Drunken Orgies

Dionysus (Bacchus) was the worship of the god of orgies, wine and debauchery.

Slide-14: Zeus: King of the Gods

Zeus worship (King of Greek/Roman Gods) Largest and most famous wonders of ancient world the altar of Zeus was extending 40' over cliff.

Slide-15: Asclepius: God of Healers

Asclepius worship (God of healers) - snakes that slithered over people on dark and wet floors to cure them.

Slide-16: Satan's Throne

It is also possible that Satan was actually running his global operation out of this city. Remember how Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that there are hierarchies in Satan's realm: thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

Note how twice in verse 13 Jesus says that Satan was very active in this place.

Slide-17: Result Alluring Immorality Center

All of these gods and the God of this world being concentrated at this time, in this place made Pergamum very alluring. It was known as an IMMORALITY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD. Bacchus/Dionysus

Slide-18: Intimidating Idolatry Center

The IDOLATRY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD to the king of the gods of the pagan Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus or Jupiter.

Slide-19: Confusing False Healing Center

The FALSE HEALING CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD with drug induced stupors, snakes and the false god of healing: Asclepius

Slide-20: Deadening Satanic Power Center

Finally, SATANIC CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, the Devil himself had a personal throne there for the time as headquarters for his global rebellion.

And in that place was a church... the assembly at Pergamum. Lesson One, Christ can save! The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment, from Jesus, a pardon receives.

So this assembly was right in the middle of:

1. The IMMORALITY CENTER of the ancient world. Bacchus/Dionysus
2. The IDOLATRY CENTER of the ancient world to the king of the gods of the pagan Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus or Jupiter.
3. The FALSE HEALING CENTER of the ancient world with drug induced stupor's, snakes, and the false god of healing: Asclepius
4. Finally, SATANIC CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, the Devil himself had a personal throne there for the time as headquarters for his global rebellion.

And in that place was a church... the assembly at Pergamum.

The incredible testimony of God from Pergamum is that Christ can save! The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment, from Jesus, a pardon receives.

Slide-21: THE APPROVAL v. 13

--they were saved in spite of all that...
--they claimed the true name...
--they didn't deny Christ in fierce trials...

--so, they were to be commended

Antipas was most likely the pastor of the church. Tradition says Antipas was burned to death by being thrown inside a brass bull that was heated by a fire set beneath it.

Slide-22: The Danger of Believers Compromising Their Christ-likeness

First look at v. 14-15 and note what Christ said "I have few things against you!"

First, you have **Balaam's doctrine** = what is that? "Balaam tried unsuccessfully to prostitute his prophetic gift and curse Israel for money offered him by Balak, king of Moab. So he devised a plot to have Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage. The result was the blasphemous union of Israel with fornication and idolatrous feasts (for the story of Balaam, see Num. 22-25)."²

- ✓ "Put stumbling block..." Numbers 22-25 records how Moabites contacted Balaam a prophet for hire, he prophesied 4x promising Israel's conquest of Moab and Christ's coming, they angrily fired him and God killed 24,000 of Israel with a plague.
- ✓ What? God killed 24,000 of Israel? Yes, that's the doctrine of Balaam, "If you can't defeat it, join it and defile it and God will judge it". Balaam said get them involved in sexual sin and God will judge them and did...
- ✓ Balaam's doctrine is still here -- people actually say they are Christians and live in sexual sin. And today if you are living in such sin and drawing in others, to you Christ says "I am coming to war against you".

Second, **Nicolaitans**, what's that? Nicolas supposedly started a cult but no record in church history. Many pastors through the centuries take this to be Nike-laios - conquered people.

- ✓ Yes, self-made prophets ruling with rods of iron, building ecclesiastical kingdoms of wealth and power---still with us today, sadly.
- ✓ Just quickly a side note- How did it happen? How did the pure, simple gospel get in purple robes with gold rings and set in paganism, idols and false "work your way to heaven" doctrines?
- ✓ In short, it happened in 313 AD, 2 generals were fighting to take Diocletian's (persecutor of last week) kingdom. The place : Maxentius in East, Constantine in West.
- ✓ One made a deal with some supernatural being and said if you help me win at a bridge over a river called Milvian, I'll make the empire Christian...he won and overnight the priests of pagan, Godless roman temples were part of the New Roman Catholic Church. The soldiers baptized, the old rituals renamed and

² MacArthur Study Bible, in loc.

everything was confused.

Balaam joined and defiled the Church and Nicolaitans were lording over.....

Watch out, Satan can't conquer you, but he can get you to slip into filth.

SLIDE-23: SEVEN CHURCHES: Christ's & Paul's

SLIDE-24: SEVEN AGES

- ✓ There was the Ephesian period--30-60 AD a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.
- ✓ Then came the Smyrna period--60 -300 AD the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.
- ✓ Then followed the Pergamite period, 300-500 AD in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into system, and the church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.
- ✓ Then came the Thyatiran period-- 500-1500 AD the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness of truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the church usurped the place of Christ, and the witness of Jesus were give t dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation.
- ✓ Then came the Sardian period--1500-1800 AD the age of separation and return of the rule of Christ; an age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years.
- ✓ Next was the Philadelphian period 1800-1950 AD is a time of great missionary fervor, evangelistic outreach and devotional godliness. in this time the world was penetrated with the gospel like no time since Pentecost.
- ✓ Which brings us to the Laodicean period, 1950 AD - present they is lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.

SLIDE-25: SEVEN TYPES

- ⇒ Some Ephesian Christians, with a great start but a lack of that initial consuming love.
- ⇒ Some Smyrnan Christians purified by persecution, faithful at all costs to the Lord.
- ⇒ Some Pergamite Christians, wed to the world, a country club Christian with no standards, with a focus and grip on money, car and job, only doing what is socially acceptable, compromising Scriptures absolutes, more concerned with fashion than with Holiness.
- ⇒ Some Thyatiran Christians believing and following false doctrine, with a social gospel not a divine call to the new birth.
- ⇒ Some Sardian Christians, dead as last weeks cut flowers, cold and lifeless, in a spiritual stupor.
- ⇒ Some Philadelphian Christians, sound in doctrine, zealous in ministry, outreaching the world and deeply in love with the Lord Jesus Christ!
- ⇒ Some Laodicean, apostate, counterfeit and sickening to Christ. A member of the Christless church that will thrive in the tribulation under Satan's leadership.

Slide-26: THE APPEAL V. 16

So what's the ultimate lesson? Well, the church at Pergamum had a problem...some had lost THEIR PURITY, THEIR INTIMACY and THEIR NOURISHMENT. How? Because, they got too close to the world by mixing with them, or marrying them, or loving the system.

v. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

So Jesus lovingly offers a solution to theirs and sometimes our woeful problems.

- ✓ **If you have lost your purity** - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my white stone. Do you want Christ's purity? Let Him wash and cleanse you and make you pure, as white as snow.
- ✓ **If you have lost your intimacy** - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my new name. Do you want Christ's intimacy? Let Him start drawing you to spend time alone with Him, He's waiting for you.
- ✓ **If you have lost your nourishment** - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my hidden manna. Do you want Christ Jesus to help you grow? Let Him start feeding you in His word.
- ✓ **If you have lost your focus** - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my new

ears, listen. Do you want Christ's focus? Then go back to listening to Christ speaking to you in the word.

SLIDE-27: Hold Fast

God always desires that we constantly repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to Him.

The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.