

TITLE: #3: PERGAMUM
SERIES: 7 Lessons from 7 Churches (3 of 7)
Text: Revelation 2:12-17

Balboa Community Church
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July 16, 2017

INTRO

Our series is: 7 Lessons from 7 Churches. We are looking at the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation Chapters 2 & 3. These were 7 actual churches located in Asia Minor during the era of the Roman Empire.

These letters written to the 7 churches in Revelation 2 & 3 are the words of Jesus. And in them he shares His concern for each church and instructs them what action they need to take in order to be the church that HE desires.

Today we look at the third church: PERGAMUM. Pergamum was an ancient Greek city located about 16 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. The impressive ruins of the city are located in present-day Turkey.

Pergamum was an important center for worship among the Greeks and Romans. To help us understand the culture surrounding the church in Pergamum, Joe Stowell, President of Cornerstone University, is on site and he explains what took place in the pagan worship practices that took place in Pergamum.

Let's look now at the letter of Jesus to the church in Pergamum. It's found in Revelation 2:12-17.

INTRODUCTION

Revelation 2:12 - Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword. NLT

Pergamum was a sophisticated city and the center of Greek culture and education. It boasted a 200,000-volume library that was second only to the famous library in Alexandria, Egypt.

Pergamum was the center of worship for some of the most important gods of the day — Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius (uh-SKLEE-pee-us).

The city's chief god was Asclepius, whose symbol was a serpent and who was considered the god of healing. People came to Pergamum from all over the world to seek healing from this god.

The city was also a center for worshiping the emperor. Last week we learned that Smyrna had built a temple to the emperor. But Pergamum was the first city to receive permission to build a temple dedicated to a governing emperor, Augustus. They built a temple to worship a living emperor.

The proconsul (governor or military commander) of Pergamum had been granted the rare power known as "the right of the sword," meaning that he could perform executions. He had the right under Roman law to put people to death.

To the church in this city, Christ described himself as the One who has the sharp, two-edged sword. Just as the sword was a symbol of Rome's authority and judgment, Jesus' sharp, double-edged sword represents God's ultimate authority and

judgment. Only Christ has ultimate power over life and death.

So Christ opens this letter to the church in Pergamum by reminding them that He is the ultimate authority. And only He will decide what is true and what is acceptable.

COMMENDATION

Revelation 2:13 - I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city. NLT

Pergamum was the center for four large idolatrous cults (those of Zeus, Athena, Dionysius, and Asclepius). So Christ calls Pergamum the city where Satan's throne is. Idolatry is satanic. Idolatry is robbing God of His glory by worshiping someone or something else.

The church in Pergamum was surrounded by the worship of idols and of the Roman emperor, yet it refused to renounce its faith. The believers held fast to the name of Christ, even after one of their members, Antipas, was killed.

It wasn't easy to be a Christian in Pergamum. Believers experienced great pressure to compromise their faith. But Christ commended the church for remaining loyal to Him.

COMPLAINTS

Revelation 2:14-15 - But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. ¹⁵In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. NLT

Despite commending believers for holding fast to the faith, Christ had a few complaints against this church in Pergamum. Apparently, some in the church were tolerating those who were teaching or practicing what Christ opposed.

Christ described the church as tolerating some believers who were like Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel.

The complete story of Balak and Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-25. In brief, Balak was the king of Moab who feared the large number of Israelites traveling through his country. He felt threatened by them.

So he hired Balaam, a sorcerer, to pronounce a curse on them. Balaam had refused at first, but an offer of money changed his mind.

In Numbers 25, we find the Israelite men mingling with pagan women, going to their feasts in the pagan temples, & then worshiping the gods of Moab. Balaam had influenced some in Israel to compromise their faith.

Numbers 31:16 explains that Balaam knew he could

undermine Israel's power by sending the Moabite women to entice the men of Israel. Balaam influenced them to worship idols, to eat food offered to idols, and to commit sexual sin.

Balaam's influence caused great disaster for Israel. That's how the Moabites were able to defeat the Israelites - not in battle, but in corrupting them from within.

The church in Pergamum had stood strong against persecution. But what Satan could not accomplish from without, he was now trying to do from within — through Balaam-like deceit.

Christ rebuked the church for tolerating people like Balaam who were undermining their faith.

These were Christians who were adopting pagan customs, customs of the world, that were contrary to the Word of God. And the church was silent on the matter.

In Revelation 2:15, Christ mentions the Nicolaitans that were among them. This was a heretical sect made up of the followers of Nicolas who believed that Christians were allowed to participate in pagan practices.

They had compromised their faith in order to enjoy the sinful pleasures of the world. Perhaps they thought that the best policy was to peacefully coexist and go along with the rest of Roman society - to blend in. But such compromise could only dilute their faith. Weaken it.

Back in verse 6, in His letter to the church in Ephesus, Christ commends the Ephesian church for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans which He also hates.

But the church in Pergamum was allowing the Nicolaitans to not only worship with them, but to influence others in the church to compromise their faith.

INSTRUCTION

Revelation 2:17 - Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. NLT

Repent! Christ was not only telling the Nicolaitans to repent; he also wanted the church to repent of its leniency toward these heretics. The church should get rid of those who were attempting to compromise the Word of God.

If the church did not repent of its sin and deal with the compromisers, then God would come and do it — with the sword of His mouth - and that would be disastrous.

CONCLUSION

Revelation 2:17 - Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it. NLT

To the one who remains faithful, God will give victory. And to the victorious in Christ, He will give great rewards. Two of them are mentioned here: manna and a white stone. Scholars are not sure of the exact meaning of each. But the manna could represent God's sufficient provision - as when he

provided food for the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness.

LIFE LESSONS

What can we learn from Christ's letter to the church in Pergamum? What principles can we apply to our lives today? What is Christ saying to the church at Balboa?

• Don't Compromise

The Christians in Pergamum were surrounded by pagan beliefs and practices. In spite of their faithfulness in some areas, some of the Christians were compromising their faith in other areas. They had allowed idolatry to creep into their congregation.

Satan is still employing that strategy today: "What you can't curse and crush, you can corrupt through compromise."

This is an area each one of us has to be careful in. It involves the individual Christian. Compromise can take place in how you live your everyday life - how you allow the world to influence you, rather than God.

You can still go to church, read your Bible, and claim to be a Christian. But you find easy excuses for compromising your faith.

One solution I have found to help me determine if I am compromising my faith, is to ask the question: "Will this action I'm taking bring glory to God? Is it the best way to glorify God?" Am I doing something that is positively benefitting God?"

All of us need to be careful in our lives not to compromise our faith. It will only weaken you spiritually, and it will dilute the strength of the entire church.

• Don't Tolerate

There were probably many in the church in Pergamum that didn't go along with the compromising faith of the Nicolaitans, but they DID allow it to continue.

God is very clear that He does not want His people to compromise their faith. Sin must be dealt with, and false doctrine must be met head-on with Scripture.

You have to be very careful about what you hear and believe. There are many in the world today who teach a false doctrine. For instance, a well-know pastor writes a book that denies the existence of hell. Others will take the gospel and add to it.

Here at Balboa we have always encouraged you to check out everything we say with the Word of God. If we are in error or have misrepresented something, please bring it to our attention. We want to be known as a church that teaches the truth of God.

And we must deal with doctrinal error carefully and correctly. Scripture encourages us to speak the truth IN LOVE. God's glory... and the other person's soul must be our motivation, not whether we are right and they are wrong.

To be the church that Christ wants us to be, we all have to be careful not to compromise our faith in any aspect of life. And together, as a church, we must not tolerate sin or false teaching, but deal with it correctly as Christ instructed us to do.