

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Revelation of Jesus Christ – I have a letter for you!
Pergamum- A True Confession but a Compromised Character: Walking the Talk
Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 26, 2011

Revelation poem

Revelation chapter one in hand,
Jesus ALMIGHTY – the Son of Man!

The Ephesus church worked hard and bold,
But they let their first love grow oh so cold!

The saints of Smyrna – persecuted and poor,
“Your faithfulness earns you so much more!”

The saints of Pergamum hold fast my name,
But beware, Christ-likeness and sin are not the same!

The point of this series, for me, is to hear God's voice in my life and in the life of this church. You remember that when I started this series I noted that God is speaking to churches in a most personal way, and I think that there is a personal message for us in these letters to these little churches in the book of Revelation. I hope you are listening with ears to hear what God's personal letter to you might include. I am trying to.

Revelation 2:12-17

¹²“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. ¹³“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war 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 the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

Persecution – error – sin. Three interesting words. These are the words that summarize the letter to the Church at Pergamum. Persecution – error – sin. Can I rewind things just a bit, because we could use these same words to describe the admonition to the church at Ephesus but for a completely different reason: In Ephesus you remember that they had stood firm against the false teachers but had left their first love. They were behaving well when it came to holding steadfast to the truth but their motivation was wrong - duty and obligation had replaced acting out of true love for Jesus.

Now at Pergamum we read that they were holding fast to the name of Christ – willing even to die for Him - but the error of false teaching had crept into the church and was turning her toward idolatry and immorality. Either way, the church is in trouble; in trouble of losing her way and ultimately losing her light. Let's look at the Jesus that comes to visit Pergamum:

The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword'

Revelation 2:12

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'

This two edged sword theme is an important and powerful word picture for Christians. Jesus is the Truth that divides and heals all at once. You remember that when we put on our spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6 (v. 17) that the only offensive weapon we have is the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

Revelation 1:16

In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Jesus the Word, the spoken voice of God made man. And by His word is truth. This sword being described here is a long spear, not the shorter weapon we think of from gladiator movies. Usually it is not two edged though. What is being described is a devastating hand to hand weapon. And if this sword is truth then lies are its enemy, and lies cannot holdup to the word and truth of God.

Hebrews 4:12-14

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Here is why your study of scripture is so important. You listen and test the words of the world that come to your ears and eyes against the word of God, then you are at least in a position to choose well. Otherwise error creeps into your lives, and then you act on it and sin follows.

John 14:23

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

You see this is where the brothers and sisters of the church of Pergamum were in trouble. Jesus chose his self description as the one who has the two edged sword because this church did not defend the truth. And here is an interesting consequence that you might not first think of - at stake is intimacy with God. Remember it is Jesus' great joy to walk among the lampstands, but there is a condition to this intimacy, not just holding fast to the truth, but living the truth. Speaking the name of Christ and living contrary to the name of Christ is more than error, it is sin.

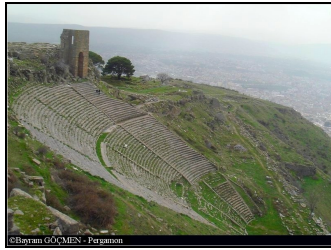
Nicolaitans - Living so close to the line until there is no line at all

Revelation 2:13-16

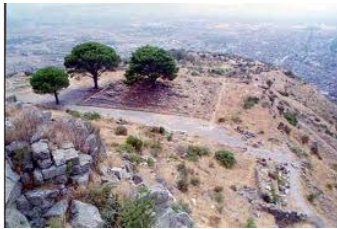
"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

¹⁵So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Verse 13 is the good news that Jesus has for the church. A commendation that recognizes that this church is true to God, and is willing to withstand persecution for God and even willing to sacrifice for Him, perhaps even die for Him. This city, like Ephesus and Smyrna, was steeped in false worship, emperor worship and worship of Zeus and Diana.



The greatest glory of the city was the so-called Nicephorium, a grove of extreme beauty, laid out as a thank-offering for a war victory of Greece over Antiochus, in which was an assemblage of temples, probably all the deities, Zeus, Athene, Apollo, Aesculapius, Dionysus, and Aphrodite.



Just behind the theater is an acropolis where all the buying and selling of goods took place for the city, kind of one stop shopping of the time. It is here that the practice of burning incense to Caesar in order to be able to buy and sell in the market may have first begun. This practice later spread to Ephesus and became so pervasive that one could not buy or sell, get fire or water, or acquire meat without declaring Caesar was god, and to refuse could mean death to the believer. This is the persecution piece.

Persecution – Error – Sin. Then error began to creep in. Rather than holding out to protect the truth, the Pergamum church began to slide. The reference to Balaam and to the Nicolaitans are lost on us in our culture, but they would have been well understood by the Jews and Gentiles of that church. These references were personifications of the “idolatry” and “immorality” mentioned in the following sentence. It seems the citizens of the church in Pergamum were big talkers, but the fruit of their lives was less than pure. And the church elders seemingly did not correct them.

Sexual immorality may be easy enough to guess at and we will spend some time on that topic with our next city but ‘idolatry’ is a bit of a lost term in our country. In Old Testament times virtually each nation had a god, and they had small representations of those gods that they could carry with them and then worship. To worship this small god would be idolatry. God gave a specific command to the nation of Israel that they were not to make “graven images” of God. That all seems easy enough. We don’t do that today. Or do we?

I believe that in our country, the greatest competition for Jesus isn’t another religion or world view, as much as we like think so. The thing we hold onto to make our life easier and to solve our crisis is money. You remember what Jesus said about money – you can’t serve God and mammon. Our wealth is a stumbling block in such an insidious way that I don’t we can even measure its effect on our faith.

Jesus gave us a new way to live, by faith in God. In the Sermon of the Mount, he challenges us to worry less about the so called security that money can buy and asks us instead to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness. Let me ask you a question? Do you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Is that your daily hope and focus? To yourselves right now, ask the question, "Do I seek first the the Kingdom and God's righteousness? Or have I been standing so close to the line for so long that the line has all but disappeared?"

You have hope – Jesus says in this letter as he did to the Ephesians “repent” choose to a little at a time as the Lord directs, let go of the things that hold you back from God. Repentance is used in Scripture in at least three ways:

- (1) A repentance that is merely a change of mind about something in a context that does not deal with salvation. It is a real repentance, a change of mind, with a real result, but it has nothing to do with salvation.
- (2) A repentance that is unto salvation. In a context dealing with salvation or eternal life, etc., it has to do with changing one's mind about one's condition in sin and need of the saving work of God in Christ. It is equivalent to faith or a part of faith like two sides of a coin. You read about this kind of repentance in Acts 2:38 with 11:17. First, we acknowledge our sinfulness and inability to save ourselves, and then (the other side of the coin) we turn to Christ in faith as the only means of salvation.
- (3) Then there is a repentance that deals with some spiritual issue in our lives as Jesus Followers in which repentance is a change of mind concerning the path we are following and is equivalent to confession of specific sins with a view to spiritual change, pursuing the path of godliness. This is the usage in these letters.

The Issue: Either we repent of our worldliness, acknowledge its presence and evil and commit to moving in a godly direction, or we face divine discipline and the loss of our light bearing capacity—our very purpose for existence as a church.

The Solution: The Christian needs to live in the Word, the two-edged sword, which penetrates and transforms us by the renewing of the mind with the mind of Christ. This includes keeping our focus on the eternal treasures of Matthew 6.

Hidden Manna, White Stones and New Names

Revelation 2:17

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Manna is the stuff that came down from Heaven to feed the nation of Israel during their travels in the desert. Manna became known as bread and in John 6:32-51 Jesus tells us that he is that manna that God gave directly from heaven. He is the bread of life that saves us from the desert of our lives.

And the white stone? In the first century, it was the custom that votes -- of all kinds -- be cast with different colored stones, representing different choices, dropped into a box or urn or other receptacle. Especially in a judicial context, a trial might be concluded by jurors by dropping either a white or a black pebble into a box. The white stone would stand for acquittal, while the black stone would stand for condemnation.

A similar custom has long been used, in more modern times, by private clubs or secret societies when voting to determine whether to admit a new member -- the white stone or ball representing acceptance, and the black one rejection. In certain situations, even one negative vote will be enough to exclude the applicant. From this has arisen the saying that one has been ***black-balled***, "or secretly rejected.

The Greek for *“stone”* here should be translated a ‘little pebble’. The same word occurs only one other time in the New Testament, where Paul speaks of the time when he worked to condemn and execute believers in Christ: *“On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote [psephos, or pebble] against them”* (Acts 26:10). To the one who walks the walk as well as talks the talk, the gift again of life, of being declared ‘not guilty’ is our promise and repentance is the path to that free gift.

Finally, when Jesus Christ calls us to come follow Him, we leave our old life behind and become a new man in Christ. According to this passage, the new creature we become receives a new name revealed to us by God. The purpose of the new name is to separate us from our old life of bondage. We are not the same person after Jesus Christ calls us out of the world to be His ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

As Christians we believe we must start a new life with a new identity. Our scriptural foundation is John chapter 3 (John 3:3, 5, 6);

John 3:3, 5, 6

Unless a man has been born over again he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . ⁵In truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from water and spirit. ⁶Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit.

Our name changes because God renames us. There is no intent to defraud or deceive anyone. Many men and women in the Bible were given new names by the Lord. Some notable examples from the Bible are Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, and Jacob became Israel. Two famous New Testament name changes occurred when Jesus named Simon ‘Cephas’ (or Peter) and Saul of Tarsus became Apostle Paul.

This new name, which is known only to him and us indicates a relationship of great closeness. We often have shared names with those to whom we are closest. Lovers share names with one another that would be inappropriate for anyone else to know. We do that for your children too, names that only we use and it displays an intimacy that no one else shares. Here Jesus is saying that he will come to us with the same kind of intimacy.

Do you see what he is doing? What makes us vulnerable to the love of money and to immorality is the perception that we are missing something in life. If only we had more money, prestige, sexual pleasure, more something, then we would really achieve what we desire deep inside. But the Lord is saying, "If you will trust me, I am the one who will supply what you need. I will be your intimate Companion, the one with whom you can share your deepest longings. What you regard as lost to you, thereby making yourself vulnerable to this other teaching. I will make up to you in intimate friendship." What a great promise he makes to those who resist the teaching that says pursuing the good life is what Christianity is all about.