

The Seven Letters from Jesus
Letter #3 – Sent to the Church of Pergamos
Revelation 2:12-17 (5/3/09 AM)

The entire Book of Revelation is written to seven churches. (1:11) “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia:”

These letters contain the last audible message of the risen Jesus to His church. These are seven literal local churches that existed in John’s day as well as seven types of local churches that exist today.

The city of Pergamos was wealthy and wicked like Ephesus and Smyrna. It was located about 50 miles north of Smyrna. Today there is a Turkish village called Bergama on the site of ancient Pergamos. In John’s day Pergamos was the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

The only biblical record of the church of Pergamos is in these verses. It is not mentioned in Acts or the Epistles. It must certainly have been impacted by the church at Ephesus. Acts 19:10, “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

The name Pergamos has a dual meaning being a compound word. It comes from the word for city or high tower and the marriage. In reality it means “married to the high tower”. Pergamos was an important religious center because four main worship centers were found there: the temples to Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus (better known as Bacchus), and the altar to Zeus. All four prominent temples were built on a large hill in the city of Pergamos. The most prominent was the altar to Zeus (picture). The Pergamos Christians are pictured as being married to the world. Satan saw that persecution strengthens the church but infiltration weakens the church.

The Church of Pergamos Is Symbolic of the Compromising Church

We have seen that the seven letters all follow a basic pattern. They all begin with a vision of the risen Christ.

1. The Vision of the Lord Jesus (12)

A Part of the Vision of Chapter 1 Applied to Each Church

“These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword”

The sword is symbolic of Christ’s judicial judgment. Jesus identified Himself this way because of their compromising lifestyles. The picture in chapter 1 is “out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”. This same picture is seen in chapter 19 at Christ’s Second Coming. The sword coming out of His mouth pictures the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

• The instrument of salvation

We are saved by hearing the Word; Romans 10:17, “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” When we are saved we are set apart from the world by the Word; John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” God uses the Word to cleanse the Church; Ephesians 5:26-27, “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church”

The Word of God Never Condone Sin

• The instrument of judgment

Jesus Christ will judge the world by the Word of God.

John 12:48, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”

Romans 2:16, “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

Those Who Reject the Gospel Will Be Condemned By the Gospel

2. The Commendation from the Lord Jesus (13)

Only Jesus Knows the True Condition of Each Church and Each Christian

“I know your works”, every letter contains this statement, “and where you dwell where Satan’s throne is”.

Pergamos was the first Roman city to build a temple to Caesar. Some believe that this is the reason for the reference to “Satan’s throne”. Others believe it refers to the altar of Zeus.

Pergamos also contained a temple to Asklepios, represented by the symbol of a snake. The city was famous for their medical practices which included a lot of superstition.

MacArthur, “When you went to the temple you went there to be healed. In the temple harmless snakes slithered all over the temple floor and in order to be healed you slept on the temple floor. While you slept the defused multiplicity of the deity of Asklepios crawled over you and infused you with its healing power. Satanic? Yes. Right from the old serpent himself.”

Even today the common medical symbol is a snake winding around a pole.

- **They did not deny their Lord**

“And you hold fast to My name”

The name of Jesus is always connected to His person and work. The Christians at Pergamos did not deny their Savior. They were truly saved. 2 John 9, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”

Living in the Center of False Religion they Held Firmly to Christ Alone

- **They did not deviate in their doctrine**

“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.”

Jude 3, “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”

The body of truth delivered to the church by the Apostles and based upon the Old Testament. Antipas literally means “against all”. Tradition says that he was burned to death inside of a brass bull.

Living under the Threat of Persecution they Held Firmly to God’s Word

3. The Rebuke from the Lord Jesus (14-15)

They Tolerated Error

When Satan cannot destroy a church as a roaring lion he will come as the subtle serpent. The spiritual leaders and members at Pergamos failed to deal with sin in their congregation. “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold...”

- **Separation became assimilation**

“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.”

Balaam was the prophet in [Numbers 22](#) who Balak the king of the Moabites hired to curse Israel. Balaam tried three times to curse Israel but God forced him to bless them instead. Since he could not curse them he planned to corrupt them and earn his money that way, [Numbers 31:16](#), [2 Peter 2:15-16](#), and [Jude 11](#). He told Balak to have the Moabite women move in amongst the Israelites and intermarry with them and turn them to idolatry. In Pergamos there were men teaching that you can be a Christian and worship idols, commit sexual immorality and intermarry with unbelievers.

[James 4:4](#), “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

The Church Can Never Condone Sinful Living

- **Liberty became license**

“Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

Note that what had been “deeds” in Ephesus became “doctrine” in Pergamos. This represents Christians who pervert the doctrine of grace and teach extreme indulgence of sinful practices.

[1 Peter 2:16](#), “as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.”

[2 Peter 2:19](#), “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”

The Church Must Love What Christ Loves and Hate What Christ Hates

4. [The Command from the Lord Jesus](#) (16)

A Command to Action

- **Repent of your tolerant attitude**

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

Sinful behavior cannot be allowed to continue unchallenged. Jesus deals with sin in the lives of His children. [Hebrews 12:7](#), “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” God expects His church to do the same thing. [1 Corinthians 5:6-7](#), “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven.” Many will say that this is unloving.

True Love Does Not Tolerate Sinful Behavior

[1 Corinthians 13:6](#), “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth”

5. [The Promise of the Lord Jesus](#) (11)

Every Letter Includes this Exhortation

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

These messages are for every church and every Christian.

“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.”

The one who overcomes is the true Christian.

- **The hidden manna represents Jesus**

[John 6:47-50](#), “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.”

Another Illustration of the Promise of Eternal Life

- **The white stone represents God’s blessing**

The champions in athletic contests were given a white stone as an entry pass. A white stone was used by a judge to vote an acquittal. A change of name in scripture often accompanies a blessing such as Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel.

The Approval of God vs. the Applause of Men