

Revelation 2: 12-17 Pergamum

In his 1983 Templeton Prize address, Solzhenitsyn also said, **Today's world has reached a state which, if it had been described to preceding centuries, would have called forth the cry: "This is the Apocalypse!" Yet we have grown used to this kind of world; we even feel at home in it.**²

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/12/aleksandr-solzhenitsyn-men-have-forgotten-god-speech/>

Every age has had its darkness and its dangers. The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them.

Trueman, Carl R.. The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self (p. 30).

If you wonder whether or not you have the courage to stand firm, be patient. You will have your chance. To paraphrase the title of a book by Erik Erickson, the spirit of the age will make you care. If you think you can go to some neutral safe zone or stay on the sidelines, watch out. **YOU WILL BE MADE TO CARE.**

That is what the early churches faced- they were **MADE TO CARE** about emperor worship and issues of idols. That is what Christians has faced around the world for 2000 years
Standing by quietly while truths and implications of the God's Word are under assault doesn't work well. Just ask Adam in the garden. His silence when Eve was being tempted and when she gave the fruit to him was deadly. As one black pastor put it, 'Where was Adam when Satan came rolling up on his Boo?'

The history of the OT AND NT saints is marked by iniquity done while many stood by in silence. Jesus doesn't want us to remain silent when it comes to teaching truth and correcting error. We've had a glimpse of that already in the first two letters to Ephesus and Smyrna. Today we see the letter to Pergamum.

**** WE MUST REMEMBER** that these churches are pre-Christian not post-modern or post-Christian, although the more post-Christian we become, the more we look like the pre-Christian world.

Message to Pergamum

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make 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 him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

Upholding clear cut definitions and facing the logical implications of religious views is what Jesus is calling for in Pergamum (and Walker county)

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

**** General observations about these letters:**

= Right teaching or doctrine is important to Jesus. Despite the good they are doing in upholding and fighting for truth, He will point out where error continues.

= While Jesus is quick to commend, He is also quick to rebuke. We don't like this Jesus.

We might be prone to say, "Come on Jesus, give them (US) a break."

We'd prefer that Jesus were as lax about sin, idolatry, and immorality as **WE ARE.**

We like the little refrigerator magnet or wall hanging that says, "JESUS WON'T MIND."

Tell that to the church at Pergamum. There are some things that he clearly DOES mind to the point of saying, "I have a few things against you."

Depending on who is saying that to you, you will either NOT CARE, or you will pay attention. Those are not words that you want to hear Jesus.

"Well, I just like to hear or think about the good things that Jesus says to me."

Then you don't have a REAL relationship with the REAL Jesus. You have a STEPFORD Jesus. ...a robotic cosmic "yes man" whose only job is to make you feel good about you.

The ANTI-DOTE to that is to READ THE BIBLE, especially this book of Revelation. Jesus is there and He is not silent about what displeases Him.

Which of these is not like the others?

Ephesus The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this

Smyrna: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Pergamum: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: (2:12, 1:16)

Jesus described as the one with the sharp two-edged sword sounds a bit more menacing than the other two references. No matter how you interpret the 'two-edged sword', this image is one of Christ standing over the church as a judge as He calls them to repentance from false teachings.

Pergamum is probably identified as the place "where Satan has his throne" because it was the seat of Roman government in Asia. Pergamum asked to build the first temple of the imperial cult in Asia around 29 B.C. in honor of the emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma. The requirement of worship to the emperor was the looming danger to Christians at the time Revelation was written, so John / Jesus obviously see the Roman government as Satan's tool. Rome was not the first or the last government to act according to demonic values.

In Pergamum, emperor worship was linked to patriotism and civic loyalty. In the middle of the city was an acropolis upon which were built many temples for the worship of various gods. So, for both political and religious reasons, it was a difficult environment for Christians.

The text indicates that there had already been a martyr in Pergamum, Antipas. Perhaps this was a result of the refusal of a Christian to conform to emperor worship. There were to be many more. Remember that the word for "witness" here is the Greek martyrs. Those believers live in Satan's hometown, SO it is not going to be easy for them.

v. 14 speaks of Balaam who, both in Jewish and Christian thought, was the prototype of all teachers who advocate compromise with pagan society and pagan morals. There is a long Balaam narrative in Numbers 22-24 but in chapter 25 we read...

1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.

In Numbers 31 we see connection with the counsel of Balaam...

31:16 Behold, these (women) caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the Lord.

So, Jesus compares the practices of Pergamum with those of Balaam who encouraged Israel to sin through idolatry and immorality. Balaam had become shorthand for false teachers who sought to influence believers to engage in ungodly practices (Beale/Kim p. 66)

There were teachers whose advice about engaging with the culture was a danger according to Jesus. Meals with food sacrificed to idols usually took place in temples to the emperor or other pagan gods. These feast

celebrations also offered the attractions of sensuality and worldliness as well as that of the safety from persecution that came through such accommodation to the culture.

The Nicolaitan viewpoint was characterized by a laxity toward pagan practices.

*** APPLICATIONS

Do we find examples of Balaam and Nicolaitans today?

Yes, and we best not think they are merely threats from outside the church or the Christian tradition. THE real danger is theological and practical collapse from within. For example, two countries with deep roots in our “reformed” tradition, Scotland and the Netherlands, would barely be recognizable by their forefathers in the faith.

What we learn from scripture and church history is that “heresy is to be found in the direction of the culture, not away from it.” (Abraham Kuyper) There is a constant pull to accommodate to the culture so that we don’t come off as weird, intolerant, and, judgmental.

We find Balaam and Nicolaitans when ruling elites worldwide (modern day Imperial Cult) seek to usurp power over churches and people of faith by forbidding their worship and assembling together.

Rayburn – “It seems that the Nicolaitans were not denying essentials of the faith as much as they were promoting subtle compromise with the cultural practices.”

It sounds like a philosophy of “What’s the harm? We need to go along to get along. Participating will open doors for ministry, etc”

We might ask, “What’s the problem?” Well, we don’t know all the details, but we know this much: Jesus hated the teaching and practice of the Nicolaitans. We saw that in the letter to Ephesus. Here in this letter, he says, “Repent or I will come and make war with them.” THAT CAN’T BE GOOD.

Common biblical theological sense would tell us that we want to give the benefit of the doubt to NOT COMPROMISING WITH THE WORLD. 1 Jn 2:15-17

Often, the common sense and wisdom we need comes from getting input from other believers who are grounded in the Word. Culture is like the current of a river; it will carry you with it. If you are trying to navigate the current of culture by yourself, you will probably capsize and drown.

EX: WHITE WATER RAFTING “the whirlpool” It took all of us paddling together to rotate the raft. As Burt Reynolds said years ago in a rafting movie set in NE GA, “You don’t beat this river.”

If Balaam was the BIBLICAL prototype of ALL teachers who advocate compromise with pagan society and pagan morals, then an atheist chaplain is certainly THE MODERN sign of compromise with our pagan society.

Last week I mentioned the passing of the Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong. He wrote his Twelve Theses for reimagining Christianity.

Sadly, his voice was not new or unique. The seeds of the collapse of the church in the west were sown years ago. We’re seeing the harvest today in a big way. It took a while, but the wheat and the tares have been growing up together within the walls of the visible church.

We live in a culture where truth is something that lies more on the subjective side of life rather than the objective; it belongs more to feelings and longings and aspirations than to facts. When the definitions of important words in the vocabulary of a people are being changed – words such as truth, the unborn life in the womb, marriage, man, woman, male, female – you know that powerful forces are at work. Satan is so powerful he can even rewrite the dictionary. (Dr. Rayburn)

But...Even those who claim to be relativists can't do so with a straight face because they proclaim with absolute certainty that there are NO absolutes.

v.16 Again, as in the first letter, there is a threat that if this sin is not repented of the Lord will judge the church. The sin of the church was its indifference to the presence of this laxity toward Christian faithfulness among some if not many of her members. The Lord would come to the entire church, but his wrath would be particularly directed at the heretics.

There is something eerily contemporary about this letter written nearly 2000 years ago: a culture proud of its sophistication, but sensual and worldly in its outlook; a Christian church being tempted to accommodate its ethics to those of the surrounding culture; and a growing rift between church and society. What is there about the church in Pergamum that we cannot immediately identify with?

The people of God are always living in the midst of a certain cultural context. Even Israel, which was a theocracy, was surrounded by the pagan nations. Most often, Israel's downfall came because their leaders were following the way of the nations.

The earliest warnings to Israel prior to entering the promised land sounded like this, "Don't follow after the Gods of the nations whose land you will soon possess." The OT, especially the Book of Judges, is a narrative of how Israel and Judah struggled to be faithful to God.

In 2nd Chronicles 33 King Manasseh did more evil than the nations the Lord destroyed before them. verse 6ff

He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger. 7 Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God ... 9 Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.

We see another example of deluded thinking in [Isaiah 47:10](#)

10 You felt secure in your wickedness and said,

'No one sees me,'

Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you;

For you have said in your heart,

'I am, and there is no one besides me.'

This "I-centered" view of life is at the heart of all idolatry and sin.

Kids song: Angels Aware

We've got I trouble, (I trouble), ev'ry-body's lookin' out for number one;

Me myself and I trouble - what's gonna become

Of all this I trouble?

I trouble is Why trouble is getting out of hand.

Our "I" trouble began in Gen 3

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "...3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' "

4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"

<https://albertmohler.com/2021/09/22/briefing-9-22-21>

One current manifestation of this desire to be like God and have personal autonomy is seen in the argument IN FAVOR of abortion. A recent USA today article notes that prominent women athletes argue that abortion is essential for the autonomy of women.

If we're honest, the human idea of self-autonomy is misleading, and there is something very skewed when a necessary ingredient for such autonomy is the right to kill your unborn child.

A part of the argument made in the Roe v. Wade case almost 50 years ago, was that women can never be equal with men unless they are capable of being equally NOT pregnant. **It seems that the capability of being equally not pregnant as a man is restricting a woman's autonomy, and we live in a world where the autonomous self is supreme.**

Ironically, the current moral revolution has destroyed the lines between man/woman, male/female to the extent that the accepted mantra of modern 'science' is that 'men can have babies too.' Thus some men are also incapable of being equally NOT pregnant. (Is your head exploding yet?) THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BALAAMS AND NICOLAITANS accommodate to culture and undercut God's TRUTH.

<https://thesatanictemple.com/pages/rrr-campaigns>

Not to be outdone in opposition to current laws that would restrict abortion, the Satanic Temple has come out opposed to the Texas Law that would ban abortion after a heartbeat is detected (6 weeks). Their push for autonomy has a religious twist - **Religious Reproductive Rights - "Thyself is Thy Master. Hail Satan"** They promote a sort of religious exemption from the abortion restriction known as ...

RELIGIOUS ABORTION RITUAL:

The Satanic Temple has announced that its Satanic abortion ritual exempts TST members from enduring medically unnecessary and unscientific regulations when seeking to terminate their pregnancy. The ritual involves the recitation of two of our tenets and a personal affirmation that is ceremoniously intertwined with the abortion. Because prerequisite procedures such as waiting periods, mandatory viewing of sonograms, and compulsory counseling contravene Satanists' religious convictions, those who perform the *religious abortion ritual* are exempt from these requirements and can receive first-trimester abortions on demand in states that have enacted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

<https://announcement.thesatanictemple.com/rrr-campaign41280784>

(To be fair, their website makes sure you know that they are not connected with the Church of Satan)

You may think, "this is nonsense and is the kind of thing you only find in California, etc".

Not so. In the past two weeks I've had conversations with two people in this congregation who have indicated that they have relatives who are adherents to the Satanic Temple or are outright witches.

Move over Pergamum, Satan's throne has been moved.

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

We'll pick up with v.17 next week, but it does serve to bring us to the table where we can feast on the hidden manna as a preview of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Jesus promises the hidden manna to those who overcome.

The qualification to come to the Table is that you have a NEW NAME which you receive through faith alone in Christ alone. The new name motif goes back to Isaiah 62 and 65.

One way to be an overcomer is to draw deeply upon the grace of God in Christ that is represented here by this bread and cup.

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