

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Week 8 – The Things Which Are: The Seven Churches – Pergamos, Thyatira, & Sardis  
October 25, 2016

### PERGAMOS: THE COMPROMISING CHURCH/THE WORLDLY CHURCH

#### Revelation 2:12-17

*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> 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.’*

How do we see Jesus in this message? He is holding a sharp, two-edged sword referring to His judicial authority – in His role as Judge!

<sup>13</sup> *I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.* Pergamos was the center for the worship of Dionysus, Zeus, and other pagan gods. There is a serpent motif in the throne-like altar of Zeus-Soter. “Soter” is Savior! Re: Satan’s throne, Pergamos was the first city in Asia to build a temple to Caesar (29 BC) and became the capital of the cult of Caesar worship. Emperor worship was practiced in Pergamos. And so, the church in Pergamos (and John does not reveal when or how the church was established) had been established where “Satan’s throne” (v. 13) had been set up. It was truly the center of cultic worship.

*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.* The believers in Pergamos lived in a difficult place, surrounded by pagan influences, yet they held fast to Christ’s name and did not deny Him during difficult times in a society controlled by Satan. Church tradition records that Antipas was a physician suspected of secretly propagating Christianity and not worshipping Caesar. According to tradition, it has been recorded that upon being condemned to death, Antipas was placed inside a copper bull, which was then heated over a fire until it was red-hot.

*But I have a few things against you, because you have there (possessing) 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. <sup>15</sup> Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* The church in Pergamos was tolerating heresies. The church wasn’t removing apostates w/in their midst! From the context we know that believers were eating foods that had been sacrificed to idols according to the “doctrine of Balaam,” and committing sexual

immorality. The church was participating in pagan practices. Paul speaks of this participation as having fellowship with demons (I Cor. 10:18-20). Balaam was a prophet for hire (Num. 22:7). Balaam was hired by Balak, the King of Moab, to pronounce a curse on Israel. God did not allow Balaam to curse Israel. It appears, however, that Balaam devised a plan to have the men of Israel enter into mixed marriages with Moabite women thereby producing spiritual corruption (Num. 31:15-16). The teaching of Balaam encouraged corruption through intermarriage with that which is of the world.

Jesus condemned Pergamos for tolerating the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. This cult professed faith in Christ but taught antinomianism (freedom to live without moral law) and practiced licentious living. This is a picture of the church married to the world. The Church is the bride of Christ (II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27). As the bride of Christ, the Church should not be unequally yoked with the dark works of this world's system (II Cor. 6:14).

Jesus calls the believers in Pergamos to repent. Jesus notes the judgment that would take place if the church of Pergamos did not repent: *I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.* It appears that the Nicolaitans and those who were teaching Balaam's error would be destroyed, along with their followers, from the congregation at Pergamos. Jesus desires purity among His people, and we have a responsibility to remove false teachers from the church.

What is left of Pergamos today? Ruins situated on a hill overlooking the modern Turkish city of Bergama.

### APOSTASY

- Gk. word *apostasia* – a defiance of an established system or authority; a rebellion; an abandonment or breach of faith.

- It is critical that all believers/Jesus followers understand:

- How to recognize apostasy and apostate teachers
- Why apostate teaching is so deadly
- How to rigorously defend the faith
- To test/examine their faith – is it genuine?

- There are two traits that characterize apostasy:

- A falling away from key and true doctrines of the Bible into heretical teachings that proclaim to be “the real” Christian doctrine.

- What are the essential Christian doctrines?

- God is one (Ex. 20:3; I Cor. 8:5-6....).
- The Trinity (Isa. 48:12-16; I Cor. 12:4-6; Matt. 28:19....)
- The Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4; Gal. 1:8-9)
- The deity of Jesus (Psa. 2; Jn. 10:30; Jn. 20:28....) which

includes belief in the virgin birth (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18, 23; Lk. 1:27, 34-35; Gal. 4:4....) and His bodily resurrection (I Cor. 15:13, 16; Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Jn. 2:19-21....)

- Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone (Eph. 2:8-9....)
- The inspiration of the Bible; the Bible is without error; it is God breathed (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:21; Matt. 5:17-18)

Resource: Major Bible Themes – Lewis Sperry Chafer/John Walvoord

○ A complete renunciation of the Christian faith which results in a full abandonment of Christ. NOTE: the second form almost always begins with the first. An heretical belief becomes an heretical teaching that grows until it pollutes all aspects of a person's faith. The end goal of Satan is accomplished: a complete falling away from Christianity.

The dangers of apostasy are stated in the book of Jude which serves as a handbook for understanding the characteristics of apostates. The book of Jude which he penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the only NT book devoted exclusively to confront "apostasy."

Jude's readership: *To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: ...Beloved....* These are believers; Jesus' followers! Jude makes it clear that all believers are called to this fight. It's critical that as believers, we sharpen our discernment skills so that we can recognize and prevent apostasy in our midst.

Jude 3 <sup>3</sup> *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.* Jude, it appears, had intended to write a letter regarding salvation. But, he was compelled instead to write a call to battle for the truth in light of the arrival of apostate teachers. Jude outlines how to recognize apostasy and strongly urges those in the body of Christ to *contend earnestly* for the faith (v. 3). The Gk. word translated *contend earnestly* is a compound verb from which we get the word *agonize*. Because the compound verb is in the present infinitive form, the struggle will be continuous. There will be a constant fight against false teaching. Jesus' followers should take it so seriously that we "agonize" over the fight. NOTE: Apostate teachers can be subtle. Jude tells his readership that certain persons have **CREPT IN UNNOTICED** (v. 4)! Use of the word "crept" to describe the apostate's entry into the church. The word literally means "slip in sideways; come in stealthily; sneak in; hard to detect."

Jesus makes a final promise to the believers in Pergamos:

*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 three blessings promised to overcomers who are believers (I John 5:4), are hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name written on the stone. There's speculation about the meaning of these promises. The blessings appear to concern the

believer's blessings in our position in Christ especially as it concerns Jesus' victorious reign and our eternal life with Him.

The "hidden manna" – in direct contrast to eating of food sacrificed to idols - could refer to Jesus as the "bread of life" Jn. 6:31 - *Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'* Jn. 6:48-51 - *I am the bread of life.* <sup>49</sup> *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.* <sup>50</sup> *This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.* <sup>51</sup> *I am the living bread which came down from heaven.* The "hidden" bread of life is appropriately described because the world, being blinded by the god of this world, Satan (II Cor. 4:4) cannot see Him. Jesus provides us with sustenance throughout eternity. "Hidden" regarding the manna might refer to Moses putting the manna in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies – removed from the sight of men (Heb. 9:4)

The "white stone" - The best theory regarding the meaning of the white stone has to do with the ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors of athletic games. The winner of a contest was awarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it. Might this "white stone" be our admission pass into eternal glory?

The "new name" – we are a new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24; Isa. 56:5-8). Because this new name will not be known by anyone aside from the recipient of that new name, it might speak of the personal and intimate relationship we will experience with the Lord in the Millennial Kingdom and moving into the New Jerusalem.

### THYATIRA: THE CORRUPT CHURCH/THE DOCTRINALLY DEFECTIVE CHURCH

Rev. 2:18-29

*And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,*

*'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: <sup>19</sup> "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent <sup>22</sup> Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

<sup>24</sup> *"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.*

<sup>25</sup> *But hold fast what you have till I come. <sup>26</sup> And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*

<sup>27</sup> *'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star.*

<sup>29</sup> *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Thyatira was a small town about 35 miles southeast of Pergamos. It was founded by Alexander the Great in 300 BC. It was a military city situated in a fertile agricultural valley, noted for commerce, trade guilds, and craftsmen specializing in tanning, bronze, pottery, and purple dye. The city was not a religious center. Yet, emperor worship did exist and each trade guild worshiped its own god.

Scripture doesn't indicate when the church was established. "Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira," came to the Lord under Paul's ministry in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15) and may have helped establish the church. This church, although located in the smallest city mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, received the longest letter

*These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: The title, Son of God, used by the Lord only in this verse in Revelation, emphasized His deity to a city that worshiped the sun god. The words "eyes" and "feet" speak of His judgment (Rev. 1:14-15).*

*I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.* Jesus, omniscient, all-knowing, knew their love for Him which is not mentioned in the letters to the other churches. Their service which seems to display their love for others - sacrificially reaching out to others. Their faith was real and made evident by their works – perhaps by a small group within the church. Patience speaks to endurance especially in that pagan culture. Growth was noted in that their most recent works were more than at the outset.

*Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.* This speaks of a woman in the church whose teaching corrupted God's people, as did the Jezebel of old. At Thyatira, this self-proclaimed prophetess counseled Christians within the church to become involved in the Roman religious practice of fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. The members of the church were allowing her to teach heresies to the point of their engaging in gross sin.

*To seduce* – "to cause to stray; to lead aside from the right way." Our ability to be easily led often correlates with the strength we give to our desires.

*And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.* God waited patiently for her to repent, based on His longsuffering (II Pet. 3:9).

In light of Jezebel's declining to repent, God, brought three judgments upon her and her followers. *Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.*<sup>23</sup> *I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.* From her bed of immorality, God cast her into a bed of sickness. Those who followed her into the way of literal adultery experienced great tribulation, unparalleled misery.

*Unless they repent* – God appears to give one last chance. Such is the mercy and grace of God. CONSIDER THIS: “The very time during which ungodly men are heaping up for themselves greater wrath against the day of wrath, was a time lent to them/given to them for repentance”! (Rom. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9)

*I will kill her children with death* - “Kill with death” - an Hebraic expression for slaying with the most sure and awful death. These “children” are most likely Jezebel’s converts who are following her teaching.

*and all the churches shall know that I am He* The judgment of God often serves two purposes: to chasten or eliminate the one being judged; and to serve as warning to others who might otherwise follow a similar path (Deut. 13:11; Acts 5:11)

*I am He who searches the minds and hearts* (Psa. 139:1-6, 13-18)

*And I will give to each one of you according to your works.* God will give them what they desire...the opportunity to stand before Him and be judged according to their work. (Rev. 20:12, 15). The sin of believers has been judged at the cross. Believers’ works will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ/the Bema Seat. This is not judgment concerning salvation! The Judgment Seat of Christ for believers does NOT determine whether one is saved or not. The Judgment Seat of Christ determines whether or not we will receive rewards.

*Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.*

“the rest” – those who have not known the depths of Satan. Those who have not followed the self-proclaimed prophetess, Jezebel, into “the deep things of Satan.” There were those who taught that the “spiritual” man should experience all evil to demonstrate his superiority over it.

Jesus told “the rest” that He would not place any further burden on them.

*But hold fast what you have till I come.*<sup>26</sup> *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—* Hold fast: Jesus appears to say – don’t leave the church – stand for truth without compromise until He comes. He who overcomes, those who are believers, will indeed keep His works (I Pet. 1:5). In keeping His works until the end, endurance is implied. Bear fruit with patience.

*To him I will give power over the nations— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron* (Rev. 12:5; Rev. 19:15) This role is granted to he who overcomes because of his identity with Christ. Jesus is destined to “rule all nations with a rod of iron” The word for rule means *to feed, to tend a flock, to nourish*. The root word for rule is *shepherd*. Believers will administer judgment (I Cor. 6:2-3 – believers in the Millennial Kingdom will judge the world and the angels) and will also administer mercy, direction and protection to the nations.

Jesus receives the kingdom from God the Father (Dan. 7:13-14, 27)

*'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— (Psa. 2:8-9) Remember – there were trade guilds in Thyatira – there was a guild of potters. The clay of the potter was originally intended to be formed and fashioned according to the purpose of the potter. When the clay refuses to serve its intended purpose, it is the right of the potter to dash it to pieces.*

*as I also have received from My Father Dan. 7:13-14 – One like the Son of Man receives the kingdom from the Ancient of Days – God the Father.*

*and I will give him the morning star.* <sup>29</sup> *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'* To the one who overcomes, the believers, Jesus will give him the morning star. The purpose of the morning star was to serve as an indicator of the approaching dawn. Those who see the morning star are encouraged by the fact that the long night is almost over and soon the sun will shine in its brilliance dispelling all traces of darkness. Rev. 22:16 - *I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.* The current period, between the ascension of Jesus and His Second Coming, is the "night" (Psa. 130:5-6; II Pet. 1:19). The morning star given to the overcomer in Thyatira may be the promise of a visitation prior to the dawn – in the rapture of the Church.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches* Open invitation – to hear the message of Jesus to the churches!

What of Thyatira today? It is a small, densely populated city in modern day Turkey.

How are we going to move forward knowing God's word and knowing what transpired in history? We will need to decide whether to follow false teaching that has already crept into the Christendom or the true teaching of the word of God. What's the first step? KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING the Bible. Pouring all of what you are hearing and reading through the grid of the Bible. If you don't know how to do so – pray for a mentor!

Today we've moved from Pergamos, the compromising church/the worldly church, to Thyatira, the corrupt church/the doctrinally defective church to the...

### SARDIS: THE DEAD CHURCH

Rev. 3:1-6

*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,*

*'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup> Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast*

*and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* <sup>4</sup> *You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.* <sup>5</sup> *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

<sup>6</sup> *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

The city of Sardis was 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. It stood about 1,500 feet above the Hermus valley, giving the city a false sense of security over its enemies. Sardis was defeated twice. The acropolis in Sardis, the fortified area, housed a temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Sardis was situated on five major trade routes. Great wealth was brought into the city. Jewelry, wood, and textiles were made and sold. By the second century AD, Sardis lay in decay. Today Sardis is a small “wretched” village called Sart. It is the habitation of herdsmen, buffaloes, and oxen. Today there is not a single Christian family living within Sart!

*He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:*

We see Jesus revealing Himself to Sardis as the One Who has the seven Spirits of God which is a reference to the sevenfold fullness and perfection of the Holy Spirit that rested upon Jesus (Isa. 11:2-5; Isa. 61:1-2 - *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me*) Jesus has the seven stars – the angels – who are the Pastors of the seven churches. He controls the Pastors. He holds them accountable.

Jesus gave no commendation to this church, only criticism. At the very outset we read... *I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* Sardis was an existing city – that was DEAD! It had the look of life and a reputation for religious activity. But, it lacked evidence of spiritual life.

*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.*

Wake up! There are aspects which remain! How would they strengthen what was remaining? Renewed dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Jesus revealed this in His vision to this church – He Who has the seven Spirits of God. Those aspects within Sardis that remained were ready to die!

Their works were not perfect before God. They had works – external works. What was their motivation? Was it hypocritical? Matt. 23:28 – Jesus told the religious leaders *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

They could strengthen the things which remain by removing false doctrine (isn't that a repetitive issue?), unbiblical practices, carnal leadership. Immerse yourselves in God's word.

*Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent* Recall what you received at the outset, what you heard – fundamental doctrines of the faith. Inattention, for whatever reason, had played a significant part in their drifting away from life toward death! “Hold fast” – present tense imperative – “continually hold fast.” Actively keep/own the things you have heard.

*And repent* Change their minds re: their deadness, their spiritual emptiness. Actions would follow!

*Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* Believers are to watch for Jesus. If they would not watch, Jesus would come unexpectedly, as a thief, in judgment. A thief comes to rob and destroy. The Lord has removed spiritually dead churches rather than to let them continue to infect others.

*You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.* Even in the midst of a wicked culture, there are those who trust in Him whom He will never forsake (Gen. 6:9 – Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord; Gen. 19:22ff – God removed Lot and his family from Sodom & Gomorrah; Josh 6:17 – God saved Rahab in the midst of Jericho’s destruction). Believers who soiled their garments were seen as mingling with the pagan life of the city and compromising with sin. Those not defiling their garments would walk with the Lord in white – exhibiting worthiness. Their worthiness being found in the worthiness of Jesus on Whom they believed.

*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.* Those who overcome, who are believers, shall be clothed in white garments. White garments in Scripture speak to the redeemed (Rev. 4:4; 5:8-9; 7:9-17). The sin of the overcomer will be removed from God’s sight by being covered by the “righteousness of God” (Rom. 3:5, 21-26; 10:3; II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; James 1:20). At the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-8), all believers will be arrayed in fine linen and will return to the earth with the Lord clothed in those garments (Rev. 19:14).

*and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life;* In Biblical times, the names of individuals were recorded in the city register and after their death or departure from the city, they were erased or marked out of the city register. Here we read of an affirmation that those who are born again possess eternal life and no person or thing can ever separate Christians from eternal life; their names will not be erased from the Book of Life.

*I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.* Jesus taught that whoever would confess Him before men, He would confess before His Father (Matt. 10:32; Lk. 12:8) When standing before men and women in this world, let’s consider that we’re standing before the throne of God – and boldly confess Jesus. As Jesus will not blot believers names from the Book of Life – His confession of believers proclaims His

hold on us – our belonging to Him. We are assured of eternal citizenship. Our names will be acknowledged by Jesus to the Father!

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches* Open invitation – to Sardis – and to all the churches in the Church Age – down to us. Are we listening?

### QUESTIONS

How are Jesus' messages to Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis speaking to you?

How are you going to apply what you are learning?

What are your thoughts regarding compromise? Re: apostasy?

Are you now recognizing some aspects of compromise and apostasy? If so, what is your responsibility?

Any V8 moments?

### HOMEWORK

Reread the handout for week 8 along with the Scripture references.

If you disagree with anything in the handout, why? How would you support your view – using Scripture?

Share what you are learning with others – believers and non-believers.

Read the handout for week 9 when you receive it.