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THE CHURCHES OF PERGAMOS AND THYATIRA

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION
REVELATION 2:12-23
NUMBER 4

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REVELATION 2:12-23 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."

The third church we study is the church at PERGAMOS. The angel of the church is the pastor, the messenger. This pastor has as his primary responsibility the teaching of the Word of God.

Pergamos was a religious and political center. It was the capitol of Mysia. It was famous for the greatest library of the ancient world. It would be worth at least fifty million dollars in our money today. Anthony came there to spend the winter and Cleopatra came up to see him. One day he asked her what he might do for her and she said that she would like to have the library of Pergamos. Anthony ordered that the library be crated up and had it shipped to Alexandria in Egypt. Someone in Pergamos invented paper and this is where the original parchment type of paper derived its name. The city became famous when Alexander the Great made it an independent country and later on a wealthy ruler willed it to the Roman Empire. It was a very famous medical center and university town. It was also famous for many heathen temples. Some of the most beautiful tapestries and pottery in the world were made here.

"Write" is an aorist, active, imperative and is a command to John to write down immediately what Christ was saying. The reference to the sharp two-edged sword is a quotation from Rev. 1:16 and refers to the judging power of Jesus Christ.

REVELATION 2:13 "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" We now come to the appraisal of the church at Pergamos. "I know" is the word "oida" and means the knowledge of experience and omniscience. "Thy works" refers to the sum total of the accomplishment of the church. "Where thou dwellest" has special significance for they had many heathen temples and Pergamos was the center for religious cults. In a way, Pergamos was the Devil's headquarters. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21

says that idolatry is the Devil's communion table. Most of the people didn't really believe in these heathen temples and took them as something of a national pastime. Each temple had some emblem, very much like a football team has an emblem today, something like a razorback or an owl or a bear. They really didn't worship them but had them as emblems. They would build a city spirit around these emblems, but they really worshipped wine and immorality. So Pergamos was a city where heathen worship was the general custom of the people.

"Thou holdest fast my name" refers to the mental attitude of the Christians who really put Christ first. These people were faithful and kept their eyes on Christ. "Hast not denied my faith" really should read "Hath not denied the faith which belongs to me". It is a technical word for doctrine. This is a reference to the entire realm of doctrine. You can't be occupied with Christ without knowing doctrine. Antipas was a faithful believer in Pergamos and refused to renounce Christ. They had a metal bull and they heated him red hot and opened him up and threw Antipas inside, and he was in a moment burned to death. The whole purpose was to intimidate the believers. But the believers in Pergamos were not intimidated. Antipas was a faithful martyr and he applied doctrine. He knew dying grace. So Antipas proved to be an inspiration to all the Christians in Pergamos. The phrase "Where Satan dwelleth" refers to a pagan city of temples and idols. But Bible doctrine is more powerful than intimidation. Martin Luther said it in his great hymn "The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still".

REVELATION 2:14 "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. Now we come to the criticism. The thing against them was the doctrine of Balaam. This doctrine is given in Numbers 24, 25 and 31. Possibly we should summarize that doctrine here.

1. Balaam was a Gentile believer who was hindered from cursing the children of God. Balaam hired himself out to curse people and things. For generations his family had been in the cursing business. Balac was the King of Moab and hired Balaam to curse the Jews. But he was hindered from cursing the Jews. However, he had a lust for money and because of this he found another way to get the Jews in a jam. He lived in a far country but Balac sent for him and brought him to Moab and did his best to get Balaam to curse the Jews. Every time Balaam would start to curse the Jews he would end up prophesying their glorious future.
2. Balaam advised Balac to neutralize Israel by getting them out of fellowship. Balaam knew about the importance of Christians being in fellowship and he got Balac to send hundreds of the beautiful women from Moab down into the camp of Israel and in this way divert their attention from their main task.
3. When Balaam and Balac finally parted, Balaam had earned his fee, but not by cursing the Jews.
4. Hence when you compare Numbers 25:1 and Numbers 31:16, you find out how Balaam earned his fee but did not get to curse the Jews.
5. The doctrine of Balaam is the principle of neutralizing believers by getting them out of fellowship by separating them from the source of divine power. His work caused them to get out of fellowship and stay out of fellowship.

In verse 14 we read the words, "Who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock" and it is in the imperfect tense and means he went over and over and over these things so Balac would learn them. Balaam stood on three different mountaintops and tried to curse them but God didn't let him. You see, Balac was an unbeliever and Balaam taught him how to neutralize the Jews. Balac didn't get the point the first time and had to be taught over and over again. Balac kept saying to Balaam, "Are you sure this plan will work?" Balaam told him that he was sure. "To eat things sacrificed to idols and to

commit fornication". This involved liquor and women and immorality. Naturally it was a very popular kind of worship. "Let's go to church and live it up" and this came to be the problem that cut into the power of the church in Pergamos.

REVELATION 2:15 "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." This is the New Testament counterpart of the doctrine of Balaam. It was exactly the same. This deacon from Antioch had started immorality in worship. Nicolas didn't go in much for doctrine. He just wanted emotionalism in worship and he led the people into all kinds of immoral acts and called it worship. A truth we need to learn here is this--separate yourself from those who break down doctrinal truth. Nicolas was evidently the emotional type. So we read, "Which things I hate". This was God's estimate of this kind of worship. God hates false doctrine.

REVELATION 2:16 "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." So God says, "Repent, or else I will come with discipline". The Lord will destroy the church that follows false doctrine. The worst sins outlined in the Bible are mental attitude sins and sins of the tongue. Don't let this truth escape your mind. You are, in God's sight, as bad as a murderer when you slay with the tongue. Christ fights against false doctrine.

REVELATION 2:17 "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." This is God's assurance to this local church. It is assurance for time and assurance for eternity. "He that hath an ear" is a reference to every believer. If you are controlled by the Holy Spirit and hear through the ear, then the Holy Spirit can teach the human spirit. One doctrine is built on another and you have to start and build. "He that hath an ear" is a present, active, participle and means that you keep hearing and keep hearing until finally you know it in your mind. Then the phrase "Let him hear" is an aorist, active, imperative and is a command for us to attend Bible class and hear every chance we get the teaching of the Word of God. Preaching will not get the job done, it must be teaching, teaching, teaching. Now what does the Spirit say? Only that which is in the Word of God. The Spirit doesn't whisper something in your ear which makes you queer and strange and different from everybody else. The Spirit doesn't give you a corner on some private information. The Canon of Scripture is complete. I run into certain people who tell me the Holy Spirit talks to them and they tell me the strangest and weirdest things the Spirit tells them to do. It isn't the Holy Spirit at all, it is just the mixed up emotional mind that is leading them down a blind alley. So many times an emotional warped mind will throw a Christian a curve, and this is why the Christian needs to be indoctrinated from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit speaks, but only gives truth that is based on the Word of God. This doctrine is clearly enunciated in John 14:26, John 16:12 and 15. 1 Cor. 2:9-14. It is the Holy Spirit who interprets the Word of God to the mind. The Holy Spirit is not doing extra curricula whispering today. It has all been said in the Bible.

Now some assurance for eternity.

"To him that overcometh". This is the same phrase used with each church. It refers to the fact that a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an overcomer. Christ gives us the victory. This is what it means to overcome. We are in union with Christ and we share his victory. Please notice this point--We can't live the Christian life victoriously--we share his victory. This is the only victorious life we can live. So there is no substitute for Bible doctrine. Union with Christ is the only answer. The victory belongs to Christ and the Holy Spirit overcomes. God does this for every believer. The overcomer is the one who is in union with Christ. "I will give to eat the hidden manna" is a perfect, passive, participle and this means that he just keeps on giving this manna to us. The hidden manna is fellowship with him forever. Remember then, manna is bread that sustains. The white stone refers to the way they cast their vote in those days. If you pick up a white stone and deposited it in the jar, it means

a vote for the person or proposition, but if you picked up a black stone and cast it into the jar it means a vote against the person or proposition. So the figure here is that the Lord has cast in the white stone for you and you have been elected. Christ was elected in eternity past and when we believe in him we are elected. We share his election. We have a new name written. At present you don't know what that name will be, but it will be appropriate and will be revealed to you in eternity.

The Fourth Church--Thyatira

Thyatira was a city in Lydia and was the capitol of Lydia. It was union headquarters for Asia Minor. Here was the center for the great trade guilds. The weavers, the traders, and the potters all had their headquarters in Thyatira. The purple dye came from here and made this city famous all over the world.

"The Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire" is a figure to describe Christ as the judge.

REVELATION 2:19--The appraisal of the church. "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." As in all the other churches, the Lord Jesus Christ knew the church and the works of the people. "Thy love" refers to the filling of the Spirit for love. Service comes as a result. So these people were increasing their production, they were growing Christians.

REVELATION 2:20--The Criticism of the Church. "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication; and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." That woman Jezebel refers to a female character in Thyatira who had both beauty and brains. The word Jezebel was not her name, but that name is used in order for us to know the kind of a character she was. The church in Ephesus threw her out and she went to Thyatira. She became a leader in the church. As we would say, she started as W.M.U. President and finally she just about took over the entire church. She was allowed to teach and to deceive. Let us remember that the Scripture forbids women from being pastors. These people in Thyatira who were being deceived should have known better. But they were more interested in the mechanics of delivery than they were in the content of the message. She persuaded this Thyatiran church to go in for the brotherhood movement, to forget doctrine and do those things that were spectacular and those things that had appeal. She persuaded them to enter into idol worship and this led to fornication and immorality. This was the infiltration of religion into the Christian church. Now I know people often think of an old bag when they think of Jezebel. But she was vastly more than that. She was beautiful and she had brains and she had talent. She led in a religious system that neutralized Christianity and phased it out.

REVELATION 2:21 "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." This is a very great principle of doctrine. God always gives his people a chance to repent before discipline comes. But even though the grace of God held off the coming doom, she failed to repent.

REVELATION 2:22 "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds." So God promised that he would throw her into the most horrible type of suffering. There is an old saying, "If you lie down with dogs you rise up with fleas". And the basis of the discipline here was false doctrine.

REVELATION 2:23 "And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." This is the sin unto death and please

notice that it is for believers. The second death, which is for unbelievers is going to be mentioned next. So the Lord keeps on searching the emotional pattern of these Christians. Emotion is the appreciator in the soul. But emotion has no spiritual connotation though it often accompanies spiritual things. In the realm of the spirit or mind remember, emotion is connected with the soul. But remember that emotionalism is not spirituality. Emotion has a place in life but it is not connected with spirituality.