

## Understanding Revelation Part 4

### The Church of Tolerance

Revelation 2:12-17

Lets look at the third church, **the church at Pergamum**.

It is so amazing how practically, all these letters apply to the church today.

**The city of Pergamum was a capital of the region under Roman rule.**

It was the farthest north of the Seven Churches.

It was a city once the capital of the kingdom of Pergamum, which was great and flourishing

This city was situated sixty-four miles north of Smyrna.

It still exists with a population of about 14,000, known today as Bergamo.

Bergamos is found in north-easterly direction from Smyrna in the Caicus Valley, some fifty-five miles away, in Mysia, on a lofty hill, and was a great political and religious center.

Ramsay called it "the royal city, the city of authority."

Eumenes II extended it and embellished it with many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes, a library second only to the one in Alexandria.

The Kingdom of Pergamum became a Roman province B.C. 130.

**Pergamum would rival Ephesus for being a center of world religions.**

There were temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysos, in the great grove Nicephorium (the glory of the city).

Next to this was the grove and temple of Asklepios, the god of healing, called the god of Pergamum, with a university for medical study.

Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar), hence in the Apocalypse Pergamum is the very centre of emperor-worship.

**The church faced great opposition.**

They were not merely in a satanic place, but the very seat of Satan.

This definition was either given for the idol worship or the presence of the ungodly rule of Rome.

Revelation 17 speaks of a city on seven hills, and that would seem to point to the city.

Whatever the cause of the name, the city was so wicked that the Lord said it was Satan's seat of rule.

**The church was also in a very strategic place.**

Where else should or will the church be?

We will be among those that hate the Gospel.

We will be among those that choose darkness rather than light.

The world hates the Gospel, but we are IN the world, not Of the world.

In John 17, we find the prayer of the Lord.

As Jesus prayed, he prayed for his disciples until he came to verse 20, where He prayed for every one that would ever be redeemed.

In His prayer, He reveals that the world would hate those that follow Him. (Jn 17:13-21)

**This church dwelt in this wicked place possessing the commission of the Lord.**

**Our circumstances do not relieve us from our responsibility as children of God.**

The commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 were valid for the church at Pergamum.

**Sometimes we want to relinquish responsibility based upon our environment, but God's command stands.**

Jesus comes with "the sharp sword."

This sword is the Word of God.

It is used by the church, and rightfully should be.

But the Word of God is for us, and to us, but it does not belong to us, it is the possession of Christ.

That is why we must handle the Word very carefully.

Today many do not think it much to water down the Word, and even to lower its standards.

We must never forget reverently and fearfully, it is God's Word, it belongs to Him.

We must carefully and prayerfully expound its teachings, but never demean its value.

Sadly, man has attempted to play God and has caused confusion instead of enhancing the study of the Word.

Why has this happened? In my opinion, **modern religion has forgotten to whom the Word of God belongs.**

In Revelation 1:16,

**This two edged sword would smite the sin of the church.**

In **Hebrews 4:12**, we see the Word of God described as "*quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints*

*and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

We can read the Word, study the Word, teach the Word and Preach the Word, but we do not the work of the Word.

It is the power of God's Word that changes and challenges us.

**The Word also strengthens the saints of the church.**

John had explained this in an earlier writing (**1 John 2:14**) *“I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”*

This writing was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and was for the benefit of the church.

It is to help us overcome the wicked one.

As you can see, this is exactly what the church at Pergamus needed.

It needed the Word to overcome Satan in this wicked town.

Here we not only notice the Sword, but we notice His seeing.

To all seven churches, Jesus declares, “I know thy works.”

When we are not faithful He knows.

When we serve Him half heartedly, He knows.

When carnality seems to overcome our spirits, He knows.

When we are consecrated to His cause, He knows.

**Psalms 139:2** declares, *“Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.”*

Jesus knows where we are in our walk for Him.

In verse 13, we see the stand they took. They were willing to be marked as Christ's.

As we have seen previously, they did not shy away from being known as Christians.

They were commended for holding fast the name of Christ, even in the face of great persecution.

It would seem that the martyr that is mentioned, Antipas, was killed in relation to the wickedness of the city.

He was killed among them, which means by their side.

Some believe a mob overtook him in the streets close to where the church met.

Antipas was not named in any records of martyrs that I can find.

It is good to note that though the world may not see this martyr as one of notable worth, Jesus did.

The faithful are noticed by Christ.

The church was faithful not to deny the Lord.

Most of the church did not waiver in their personal stand in Christianity, but there was a problem.

**This problem they had should be familiar to the church today.**

In verse 14-15, **we find that they sanctioned certain sins.**

They lowered their standard of righteousness by allowing some to remain in their midst that followed the same failures as Baalim.

Baalim could not curse the nation of Israel, but he did bless them 3 times, but he persuaded Balak to deceive them to compromise and then you that Israel committed great sin, seen in

**(Num25:1-3)** *“1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. 2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. 3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.”*

Later in **Numbers 31:16**, we read additional compromise was found in Israel due to Balaam, it says, *“Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor; and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.”*

The church was allowing sexual impurity and idol worship.

**They embraced the doctrine of tolerance.**

It was a church that had thrown away the teaching of Christ for the comforts of mankind.

Ritual began to replace righteousness, and desires replaced devotion to God.

I further believe that as the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitines was connected, that it was a problem of the abuse of their liberty in Christ.

Listen **we are liberated from the law, but never free to sin.**

**Galatians 5:13** tells us, *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”*

Paul continues in **verse 16** to say, *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”*

A lawyer undertook the defense of a robber on the promise of a rich reward. He won his case, and his client

brought him the coveted money. The night being stormy, the lawyer invited him to lodge in his house. At midnight the robber arose, gagged his legal defender, retook the money he gave him and, gathering all the treasure he could find, bade his helpless host good-bye. Such is the deceit of sin and the reward of iniquity.

**\*\*We can never make a friend of sin.**

Each letter has an appeal to the lost.

**The responsibility of the church is to reach the dying world with the Gospel.**

In verse 17 we see a promise of a heavenly feast, displayed as hidden manna.

Jewish tradition says that whenever the Temple was destroyed, that Jeremiah took the manna that was in the ark of the Covenant and hid it in an unknown cave in a mountain, and when the Messiah came, He would bring that hidden pot of manna out of the cave, BUT IT IS BETTER THAN THAT!

In **John 6:49-51**, Jesus taught, *49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

This Manna will be only for those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb, different from the wilderness, it is the food reserved for the righteous.

**There is also pardon for the heavenly family.** This is seen in the white stone.

In the Greek courts, judgment was given by two stones. A white stone and a black stone.

If the judge found them guilty they would present a black stone, but if they were deemed innocent, the judge would cast a white stone of acquittal!

When I trusted Christ as my Savior, I had a stone that was mine!

And I have been made a stone unto God. Look at 1 Peter 2:4-5, it says, *"4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."*

This pardon is also secure, for the stone is engraved with my heavenly name forever.

I have a name that is my eternal name from God. Every child of God has this claim.

The prophecy of Isaiah 56:5, says, *"Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."*

That is wonderful security to the believer. The Lord names His own.

Isaiah 62:2, speaks of this: *"And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name."*

The Lost cannot understand, only those who will trust Christ alone for salvation will have a new name.

**Pergamos was a church that did not denounce Christ, but dishonored him by their compromise.**

They would not deny the virgin birth or the resurrection, but beyond the majors, everything was minor.

They were a church of tolerance.

I am surprised we have not seen a church established in our day called the church of tolerance!

The liberal theologians and politicians that yell for tolerance are the most intolerant of all.

Tolerance of sin is indifference. Indifference to sin will lead to blind carnality.

When the church, or should I say, since the church has steeped into complacency and carnality, many will die without Christ.

Tolerance is a dangerous doctrine that has always existed.

I read a story that a boy was going down to the river for a little swim. As he was leaving the house his father said, "Be careful, Herbert; the river looks fair and sparkling, but there is an ugly eddy beneath that may prove too much for you. I have tried it and know it is dangerous. It nearly overcame me. Be careful, Son; there is danger." Herbert went on and was careful for a time, but the river looked so smooth and peaceful he soon ventured out farther. His companions, who were in bathing with him, admonished him to be careful. But he called back and said, "I can swim; there is no danger." So he ventured out still farther. But soon he was heard calling for help. The undertow had him. He frantically cried for assistance, but all in vain. He went down.

So it is with sin. It may look harmless, but there is the undertow.

When we venture out, we will find that sin will take us deeper than we wanted to go, and we will go down and dishonor the Lord.

**The church needs to reject the so called tolerance of today and get back to following the teachings and standards of the two edged Sword.**

Oh that we would not dishonor Christ by our tolerance.

