

2,17,22 Rev. 2:12-17, Pergamum

I'm going to introduce this letter with a reminder of the centrality of Christ, from another angle. This author captures what we need to keep in mind as we study Revelation.

“(What we study), all the learning, all the instruction, all the discipline is toward knowing Christ, learning Christ; not learning *about* Christ, but learning Christ. That is a point of great difficulty in trying to make our purpose in all of this clear. We could take up everything there is about Christ as doctrine, as teaching, but that is not what we are after. That is not what the Lord is after at all. It is Christ Himself. He Himself is the living, personal embodiment, the personification of all truth, of all life, and the Lord's purpose and will for is not to come to know truth in its manifold aspects, but to know the Person in a living way, and that the Person being imparted to us, and we being incorporated into Him. All truth is meant to become living truth rather than merely technical truth.”

So, again, we can't lose the reality that this book is first a revelation of Jesus Christ and second a book about the future. The future is literally the embodiment of some sovereign and creative aspect of Christ.

So, with that in mind, let's look at Pergamum (some translations have Pergamos).

One of the most important applications that we can see in five out of the seven letters is that all life, if left to its own, will degenerate. As Barnhouse puts it, “Decomposition, decay and corrosion are the common lot of every material thing in the universe. Even the stars grow old.”

This wasn't true before the fall, and it won't be true in the new creation; but it's true now. And it's true in us – not just our bodies (which is painfully obvious), but also our spiritual life can ‘decompose’ if we let it. We may talk about ‘stagnation’ in the spiritual life of a believer, and that can be true temporarily; it can set the stage. But ultimately, stagnation will always give way to degeneration – either morally or doctrinally.

Satan is always watching for this and takes advantage when he sees an opening. That's when “first love” is lost, Nicolaitans come in, and as we'll see in Pergamum, the “doctrine of Balaam” is introduced.

Holding to Christ in prayer and studying the truth, faithfully, is not just a means of spiritual advance, it's also the only protection we have against losing ground and opening the door to the enemy to steal, kill and destroy our spiritual life.

We won't take time now, because it could be a whole study, but if you read through Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, you'll see countless warnings and admonitions to hold fast to sound doctrine and to expose and resist any teaching that is either wrong or is less than the full counsel of God.

What I mean by "less than" is that teaching can be more or less accurate, but if it's milk, no one can advance to maturity or avoid stagnation on a steady diet of milk. And as we've seen, if a person is not moving forward, they will eventually move backward.

This is *not* a good time in the history of the Church or the world to be decomposing. It is, however, the generation when the Church has reached a condition of the greatest spiritual blindness in the last 2000 years – it's what we see in Laodicea;

(Rev. 3:17-18) "You do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, *so that you may see.*"

That's what we are up against. Are we among those who "see" or those who don't? That's one of the criteria that determines whether a person is Laodicean or Philadelphian.

Ok, let's dive into the letter.

I'll start by reading through our passage in Rev. 2:12-17;

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of

Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”

Let’s start with something we can easily recognize from our study in chapter one: the “sharp two-edged sword”. But this time we’re going to make an application. We know this is referring to the word of God, so with that in mind, listen to the specifics of what this “sword” is designed to do.

(Heb. 4:12-13) “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. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

The sword accomplishes three things;

- 1) Divides soul from spirit
- 2) Discerns thoughts and intents (motives)
- 3) Exposes anything that needs to be exposed

The human soul is made up of mind, emotion and will. This is how all unbelievers (and many Christians) interact with their environment. Their five senses take information in; their mind processes and interprets that information; their emotion reacts and motivates; and then their will decides what they’re going to do about it.

For the Christian living from his soul, he operates this same way in a church setting. His five senses (mostly hearing and seeing) take everything in; his emotion reacts to his mind’s interpretation of what he sees and hears, and then he decides what action he wants to take.

We aren’t supposed to be soul-based like the world; we are meant to be spiritual men and women. We have something they don’t have – a human spirit that can provide our minds with spiritual insight, discernment and understanding.

(1 Cor. 2:13-14) “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural (soulish) man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things.”

This is why it’s so important that we allow our souls and spirits to be ‘divided’ by the sword of the Spirit. The source of our understanding must not be based on our five senses with our souls running the show; our understanding must be based on spiritual discernment; otherwise, we’ll be deceived.

I shared this illustration several years ago in another study we were doing, but I think it can help us see what happened to Pergamum also, in this whole area of soul vs. spirit. This is a description of a worship service;

“The whole assembly stood there with the greatest reverence before this highest Majesty and most powerful Inspirer of awe, before which the greatest of souls becomes so little as to be almost nothing. And if we had not been witness to the movement of the body during this event, the raising of hands during the songs and prayers, and the expressions of humility – and if we had not heard the beating of the hearts before this immeasurable grandeur – we would have thought ourselves transferred to another life; to heaven. And, truly, we were at that hour in another world; the world of the Spirit. We were in the house of God, in God’s immediate Presence, and all with lowered heads and humble tongues and voices raised in prayer and praise, (were surrounded by) weeping eyes, awestruck hearts and pure thoughts of intercession.”

This was a worship experience which occurred in the early 1900’s that shows the impact on the attendees of the Islamic Ka’aba.

So, what if a powerful event like this was held in a Christian church on a Sunday morning and instead of being saturated with the forms and words of Islam, was instead saturated with Christian forms and words? Would we know whether we were dealing with the Holy Spirit or with a service designed to appeal to our soul – our mind and our emotions?

As we saw in Heb. 4 and 1 Cor. 2, *only* spiritual discernment can distinguish the imitation from the real; external observance alone can't separate the two.

(Heb. 5:12-14) "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are mature, that is, those who by reason of use have their (spiritual) senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

The enemy has saturated the American church with milk, because he knows that if this is their spiritual diet, they won't have their spiritual senses exercised – they won't be able to tell the difference between a church living by its soul and one living by its spirit.

It seems that many in evangelical Christianity believe they are impervious to deception. The eternal security of the born-again believer in Christ does not prevent him from being "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

We may be evangelical and safe in Christ, but we are not immune to deception. There are too many warnings in the scriptures given to us regarding the subtlety of the last day's deception for us to consider ourselves invulnerable to being deceived.

Pergamum was soul-based. The teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans *appeared* reasonable and definitely had a strong appeal to the emotions.

(Gen. 3:6) "When the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food, that it was *pleasant to the eyes*, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate."

Look what Eve used to make her decision. She "saw" (the sense of sight) that the food was good. It was "pleasant to the eyes". And her mind determined that it would make her wise. So, she went for it.

Spiritual discernment would have seen through this and would have recognized the hand of the enemy behind what was offered.

Many of the churches in our nation are being conditioned to walk by sight, by empiricism, not by the spiritual insight and discernment that come with in-depth study and spiritual growth.

Our largest churches are characterized by that which appeals to the soul (video clips, stage lights, celebrity-status preachers, performers, energy-charged music, etc.). And we have come to believe that these things have spiritual content.

If they were removed, the church would no longer be popular.

Let's get more personal with this; you walk into a church and you want to make sure you're in a church that's spiritually alive; so, you begin to look around and try to come to some kind of conclusion about that.

You might start with the people, who seem friendly and 'down to earth'; then you think about the music and the *ambience* (for lack of a better word), finally you consider the message and the personality of the pastor.

With all this floating around in your brain, you come to the conclusion that since the people are friendly, the ambience shows that the church is very active in outreach, both local and foreign; they have small groups for fellowship; the music stirred your soul and the message was clear and practical - this church is spiritually alive.

Nothing you just did has anything to do with spiritual discernment; it's all interpretation based on the same natural abilities an unbeliever has – five senses plus the working in the mind of reasoning and analysis.

But the human spirit (which is dead in the unbeliever) has been brought to life in the Christian at new birth so he can interpret reality by his spirit, which receives *its* information and understanding from the Holy Spirit. Everything becomes, as Paul puts it, "*spiritually discerned*".

Listen again to the passage we saw early in 1 Cor. 2;

"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural (soulish) man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things."

The only way to know for certain whether a church, a pastor, or another believer is not spiritually dysfunctional is to ‘see’ with the spirit, not the soul. And as Heb. 5:14 tells us, our spiritual senses have to be exercised over the course of our lifetime to become increasingly accurate, both for personal protection against deception and to be able to help others.

And that won’t happen if our primary means of interpreting reality is our soul; our sight, our experience and our reasoning; and it won’t happen if we don’t even know *how* our spiritual senses are to be exercised.

This is why the Lord began His letter to Pergamum with the “sword of the Spirit” which divides soul from spirit. Because spiritual life can be imitated, and if that imitation can’t be seen for what it is, deception is inevitable.

That was the *bottom-line issue* with Pergamum – the inability to divide soul from spirit in real life.

It’s bad enough that contemporary pastors have censored God’s word by ignoring 1/3 of the Bible because they don’t want to teach eschatology, but when you combine that with the fact that they are giving their congregations a steady diet of pabulum, telling them what they want to hear each week rather than what they *need* to hear, it’s easy to see why the church in our country has lost its salt and light, and why our nation has been taken over by evil and darkness.

We like to blame the democrats and the globalists, but the real fault lies with the churches who have failed to provide the spiritual and moral preservative needed to keep this from happening.

Spiritual life in American Christianity has been redefined from that which is based on eternal spiritual reality to that which is based sensory presentations.

All of this is the work of the principalities and power we wrestle with in our generation. It is the psychological conditioning of the church in the final generation to replace the spiritual with the sensual; to believe that that which is outwardly impressive is true and of eternal value, and at the same time to disregard the seemingly irrelevant and boring nature of the instruction and protection we so desperately need. Again, we are being conditioned to be soulish, rather than spiritual.

As Lance Lambert put it;

“In multitudes of places, so far as the preaching is concerned, so far as the activities are concerned, no fault can be found, but there is no sense of spiritual vitalizing. There is no impact, no moving of the people to register the testimony of the risen Lord against the forces of evil. The enemy is getting them all quietly, nicely, snugly, into spiritual death.”

Don't forget Satan has had 6000 years to study us and to learn what works and what doesn't work when it comes to neutralizing our spiritual discernment.

This is why, when He writes to Pergamum, our Lord begins with “He who has the sharp, two-edged sword”. Their need, and ours, is to have our soul and spirit separated, to recognize the difference, so we're not ruled by our soul, but by our spirit.

This also applies to our being able to discern the signs of the times. A purely academic researcher can list the signs given in places like Matt. 24 and then compare what he sees happening in the world with what that chapter tells him.

That *is* where we all have to start; that's just keeping up on situational awareness.

But there's another step that should be taken that *partly* involves specific signs, but *mostly* involves spiritual discernment. The soul is involved, but the spirit is ruling.

Here's an explanation of this by Sparks;

“How then do I best know that the coming of the Lord is drawing near? Not best of all by prophetic signs, but by what is going on within the hearts of the Lord's people. That is the best sign of the times, namely, what the Spirit of God is doing in the people of God. But maybe you are not interested in that. You would rather know what is happening with Russia, China and Israel, and how close are we to the great conspiracy of Israel's invasion from the north? What about the revived Roman Empire? I am not diminishing the importance of those things, I'm only saying that there are multitudes of people who are simply engrossed in prophecy as a thing, whose spiritual life counts for nothing, who have no deep, inward walk with the Lord. But if we keep close to Him Who is the sum of all truth, if we move with Him and learn



of Him, we shall better know the course of things. We shall know what is imminent. *We shall have in our heart the whisperings of preparation.*"

That's probably enough on the implications of vs. 1 – the "sword of the Spirit". But you can see how important it was to the Lord to introduce His messages to these churches by beginning with something about Himself that would indicate their greatest need.

We saw last time that many in Smyrna were facing martyrdom, so the Lord started his letter to them with, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and is alive." He starts by emphasizing resurrection.

With Pergamum, He starts by emphasizing the division of soul and spirit by the power of God's Word. This is what had caused their downfall. They had the wrong part of their new creation humanity in charge – and didn't realize it.

Then in verse 13 He commends them;

"I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives."

As far as I know, this is the only passage in the Bible that identifies Satan's headquarters in the first century.

I don't know if any of you have read Hyslop's book, The Two Babylons, but he traces historically the fact that the Babylonian priesthood was uprooted and moved to Pergamum. So, there's definitely a connection between the ancient demon worship of Babylon and Pergamum.

Pergamum was a very dark place to live, so the encouragement they received about remaining true to the Lord's Name was definitely worthy of being commended.

I don't know where Satan's throne is at present, I've heard different opinions on that (New York, Rome, Olympia, Portland, whatever – everybody thinks that where they live is as dark as it gets), but we can surmise that during the Tribulation, it appears to be Jerusalem. We'll look at that later in Revelation.

Antipas was the shining example of the willingness to suffer anything to remain faithful to Christ.

Here's a historical account of his martyrdom;

“Church tradition tells us that this first martyr, called Antipas, was brought before a statue of Caesar and told to swear that Caesar was God. But Antipas boldly proclaimed that Jesus alone was the Lord, and that there was no other God but He. The Roman official exclaimed, 'Antipas, don't you know that the whole world is against you?' to which he replied, 'Then Antipas is against the whole world!' Antipas was put inside a brass bull which was heated with fire until he was roasted to death. Antipas was just an obscure man of history who was totally committed to Christ.”

And then our Lord warns them of the dangers they've allowed into their church; the teaching or doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans.

We covered the Nicolaitans in the letter to Ephesus, so I'll spend a few minutes on Balaam in this study.

When Constantine became Emperor of Rome, the church joined the political world - a Church/State union took place. "Pergamum" literally means "marriage" or "union".

The church's calling, as distinct from this world, became blurred. She became earthly and more *like* than *unlike* the citizens of this world. This is what Balaam represents; the corrupting of a "set-apart" people by convincing them to adopt the ways of this world to meet the needs in their lives.

The method of Balaam is simply to destroy the distinction between God's people and the world. As we see in Israel's history with the events around their compromise with Balaam and Balak, and as Pergamum was warned in Rev. 2:16, when the church becomes increasingly worldly God's position moves from blessing to discipline.

If you want to take some time and read through the full Balaam and Balak story, it's in Num. 22.

The bottom-line is that Balaam and the Nicolaitans both represent a forsaking of the purity of undivided, uncompromising commitment to the Lord.

Rev. 2:16 shows us the Lord's warning to them if they refuse to repent;

"Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

I found an interesting application of these 'compromise' doctrines to our present age at the Net Bible web site's notes on Pergamum. Here's what the author wrote,

""The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam which is being promulgated in Churches today is the teaching that [equal] future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ's finished work on Calvary and the Christian's positional standing 'in Christ.' Thus, all Christians—regardless of their conduct during the present time—will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the [millennial] kingdom. However, the teaching throughout the Word of God is to the contrary. The Israelites did not sin with impunity, and neither can Christians. Sin in the camp of Israel resulted in the Israelites being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling. And it will be no different for Christians. If the erring believers would not judge themselves and repent, they could anticipate God's judgment (cp. 1 Cor. 11:31). Unwillingness to repent shows that a person is not a faithful believer. They would die by the sword proceeding from Christ's mouth. Balaam had died, ironically, by the Israelites' sword (Num. 31:8). This judgment would be by the unyielding standard of God's revealed Word that clearly condemns such behavior. Having taken sides with the enemy, they could expect God to oppose them in His war against evil."

We'll go into more detail on the consequences of compromise when we get to Laodicea. For now, it's just important to know that even though God will forgive and restore us 70 x 70 times (in other words, forever) if we acknowledge our sin to Him, but sowing and reaping are still definitely realities to those who refuse to listen to His warnings.

Finally, in 2:17-18 we have the promise of the hidden manna and the white stone for those who stay the course – like Antipas did.

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also

give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”

I’ll share a story about the hidden manna, and a brief historical sketch about the white stone so we can understand it’s significance – what it would have meant to those who heard this offer.

And as I read these, please keep in mind that what we’re reading in each of these letters is just as real and inevitable for us as it was for those in the first century. The warnings in these letters should be seriously considered, but the promises to the overcomers are also real, and are things that will be more incredible than we can even imagine now.

And as we’ll see, every offer made to the overcomer is tied into the possession of both honor in Christ’s kingdom and greater intimacy in our relationship with the King.

First, the hidden manna from this commentator;

“The ‘hidden manna’ seems to be a reference to the manna that sustained the lives of the Israelites in the wilderness. The Christians in Pergamum did not need the food of pagan festivals since they already had much better food. Christians feed spiritually on Christ, the bread of life (John 6:48-51), who is the *real* manna hidden from sight now.”

When I share about the white stone, you’ll understand better why this promise is an amazing offer, and also why it’s exclusive to the overcomer. Keep the manna and the stone together in the context of a promise to the faithful.

From Walter Scott’s commentary;

"A 'white stone' was largely employed in the social life and judicial customs of the ancients. Days of festivity were noted by a white stone; days of calamity by a black stone. A host's appreciation of a special guest was indicated by a white stone with a name or message written on it. Here the overcomer is promised a white stone and a new name written thereon, which none knows save the happy recipient. It is the expression of the Lord's personal delight in each one of the conquering band. It is by no means a public reward. There are common and special blessings now; there

will be public and individual joys then. The Lord's approbation of, and special delight in, each one of the triumphant believers will be answer enough to the rejection and scorn heaped upon the faithful in this life. The new name on the stone, known only to the overcomer, signifies Christ then known in a special way to each one, and that surely is reward beyond all price and beyond all telling. . . It is a secret communication of love and intelligence between Christ and the overcomer, a joy which none can share, a reserved token of appreciative love."

So, if we can hold on to why Christ began this letter with the "sword of the Spirit" to emphasize the necessity of dividing soul and spirit, and then understand both the meaning of each and the importance of each in the role of spiritual growth and protection, we can escape the dangers in our generation of the forces and deceptions that took down most of those in the church at Pergamum.

And we can also look forward to the full enjoyment of an intimacy with the Lord in His kingdom that only the overcomers will experience.

I'll close with a story Ray Stedman tells of the time he met Elisabeth Elliott;

"Some years ago, the well-known Christian author, Elizabeth Elliott was speaking here at Peninsula Bible Church. For a while I called her Betty Elliott because that was the name used in the book that she wrote about her husband Jim. One day she corrected me. She said, 'You know, my name is not Betty, it's Elizabeth. Betty was Jim's private name for me.' It was apparent to me that she wanted to preserve it as his name for her alone. So, I began to call her Elizabeth instead of Betty. A secret name is a special mark of intimacy. If your heart is kept from the corrupting influences of the world around, you will enjoy a beautiful fellowship and intimacy with the Lord shared between you and Him alone."