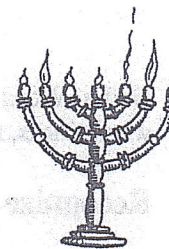


Journey Through Revelation



LESSON 5 . . . Avoiding Worldliness (Revelation 2:12-17)

NOTES

The seven churches represent the spiritual condition of churches until Jesus returns. They also represent seven kinds of Christians, one of whom is much like you. In that church, you will find a personal message from the Lord Jesus. Therefore, you need to find yourself in the seven churches.

So far in this study, we have visited the church at Ephesus (who has left her first love) and Smyrna (the suffering church for whom our Lord has only words of comfort and commendation). Now, our Lord has a word for *the church in Pergamos* (2:12a). This city is about 55 miles north of Smyrna and about fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea (see map on page 10). Today, it is the city of Bergama (ber-gah'-muh), Turkey. It has a population of about 55,000.

In John's day, Pergamos was a flourishing city with a population of about 150,000. It had a library of 200,000 volumes; second only to the famous library in Alexandria, Egypt. Many pagan gods were worshipped in Pergamos. Also, emperor worship flourished there. This letter reveals **five** requirements for **avoiding worldliness**.

Read God's Word (2:12).

How does our Lord introduce His remarks to this church (2:12b)?

The Romans conquered the known world with their *sharp*, two-edged swords. Therefore, this weapon is a symbol of authority, including the power of life and death. When Jesus speaks, He speaks the Word of God, which is *sharper than any twoedged sword* (Heb. 4:12). Our culture today is much like that of Pergamos because it worships many gods—money, success, fame, pleasure, etc. How do we know when these things become gods to us? Through reading the Bible! Why, according to the last phrase of Hebrews 4:12?

God's Word reveals any worldliness in our lives. Therefore, to avoid worldliness, read God's Word and . . .

Recognize the danger (2:13).

Like the believers in Smyrna, the Christians at Pergamos were suffering severe persecution. Therefore, Jesus says, *I know . . . where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is* (2:13a-b). This means they were living in a city ruled by sin. Many people think Satan is presently in hell, but he's not and won't be until the end of the age (20:10). What does 1 Peter 5:8c-d reveal about Satan's whereabouts and what he is doing right now?



He is doing this by tempting us with worldliness. He knows our weaknesses and will exploit them through what we watch, read, and the people with whom we associate.

Jesus commends the church at Pergamos: *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* (2:13c-f). Apart from this reference, nothing is known of Antipas. However, it is obvious he was a bold believer who refused to compromise the Gospel. We don't know anything about his death, but we do know about his reward. Antipas could say what words of Paul in 2 Timothy 4:8a?

Whatever the *crown of righteousness* is, it is the greatest reward in heaven. It is given to those who remain *faithful* witnesses, even at the cost of death. **Avoiding worldliness** has real danger. You will be in danger of missing promotions at work, losing friends, being ostracized, slandered, etc.

To avoid worldliness, read God's Word, recognize the danger, and . . .

Reject false teaching (2:14-15).

There is an old saying, "If Satan can't defeat a church, he'll join it." That's what happened in Pergamos. Therefore, our Lord says He has *a few things against* this church because some in the church *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* (2:14).

What is *the doctrine of Balaam*? Balaam was a “prophet for profit.” He was hired by Balac, king of the Moabites, to curse Israel. When that failed, Balaam came up with a plan to get God to curse them. He advised Balac to seduce the Israelite men with pagan women (Num. 31:16). Therefore, what does Numbers 25:1b record about the Israelites?

Then, the men gave sacrifices and bowed down before the Moabite’s pagan gods (Num. 25:2). As a result of the sexual immorality and idolatry, 24,000 Israelites died (Num. 25:3-9; 31:16). Therefore, the *doctrine of Balaam* is lowering God’s standards and compromising with the world. It is trying to have one foot in the church and one foot in the world.

Jesus says the church at Pergamos also has some who *hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans* (2:15). Earlier, Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for hating the practices of the *Nicolaitans*, which He also hates (2:6). The Nicolaitans evidently taught it was acceptable for Christians to participate in pagan sex orgies.

The majority of the church didn’t participate in the sinful behavior of these two groups. However, they tolerated it and apparently refused to condemn it as sin. Churches and believers of whom Jesus approves must declare the truth of God’s Word and condemn all sin, including sexual immorality. However, they must also obey what command in Ephesians 4:15a?

During my more than forty years of pastoring, many couples who are unmarried but living together have regularly attended my church. However, as I faithfully preach the Word of God *in love*, several of them have come to me and asked me to marry them. Today, some of them are among my very best friends. The purpose of preaching the Word of God is not to condemn people but to bring them to the point God’s Holy Spirit can change them.

To avoid worldliness, read **God’s Word**, recognize the danger, reject false teaching, and . . .

Repent of sin (2:16).

After making His divine diagnosis, our Great Physician prescribes the cure. What is it (2:16a)?



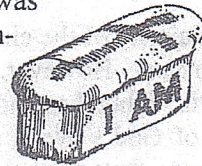
There is not an alternative cure for compromising with the world. The responsibility of pastors and churches is to lead members and attendees to Christ, the only cure for the sin of compromise and immorality.

To those who refuse to *repent*, our Lord says, *or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth* (2:16b). Fighting with the *sword of His mouth* represents judgment (19:15). How does 1 Corinthians 11:31 describe the only way to avoid this judgment?

To avoid worldliness, read God's Word, recognize the danger, reject false teaching, repent of sin, and . . .

Rejoice in the reward (2:17).

As with all seven churches, there is a call to heed what the Spirit says to the churches (2:17a). Then, our Lord says: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna*' (2:17b). The *hidden manna* probably refers to the golden pot, or urn, of manna kept in the Ark of the Covenant. It was a memorial of God's gracious provisions during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Ex 16:32). However, that manna was only a symbol of the *hidden manna* to come—the *living bread which came down from heaven* (Jn 6:51a).



Jesus also says: *To him that overcometh, He will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written*, known only to the one who receives it (2:17c). The *white stone* seems to connect to a *white stone* used to gain admission to special events. It may refer to Revelation 19:9c. According to that verse, to what do you as a believer have a special invitation?

The *new name* (2:17c) is the name God will give us in heaven. To Abram, Sarai, Jacob, Simon, and others, God gave new names with special meanings that connected with their lives. He apparently will do the same with us.

To avoid worldliness, read God's Word, recognize the danger, reject false teaching, repent of sin, and rejoice in the reward.