

Revelation 2:12-17

*12“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:
The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

13‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

Pergamum was already an ancient city when the christians of Paul's day were turning the world upside down.

They had a long history as a city state that always seemed to be on the right side of every greek and roman conquest. By Roman times, they were the capitol city of Asia Minor.

If you go there today, you can find extensive ruins of all of the palaces and theatre areas that represented their gods. At the end of a long-ish canyon there is a prominent hill, an acropolis area, where they built temple after temple after temple. Quite an accomplishment.

The temple for Trajan, the Roman Emporer~God is at the top. Then there was a complex of buildings which was a library of 200,000 volumes, 2nd largest in the ancient world, then the temple of Athena, which spills out onto the gigantic and incredibly steep arena~theatre which is the most prominent remaining piece of antiquity. It could seat 10,000 people. From the temple of Athena, you go down some

switchback ramps and land at the altar of Zeus. This structure may have been what Jesus called Satan's throne. It has a throne like shape to it. Further down the hill is the Agora, and now you're at the level of the great staging area of the theatre~colliseum.

1/2 mile or so downhill on the more flat area where the ancient city used to be, is the 'Red Basilica'. It was a temple to the God Serapis, but the christians worshiped there. It still stands. Tradition holds that this is where Antipas was martyred.

Tradition is that Antipas was appointed bishop of Pergamos by John the apostle. Tradition also is that he was burned alive in a giant bronze bull shaped incense burner.

Another mile down the hill on the flatter area is the temple and pools of the god, Asklepios. Asklepios was the god of medicine, and Pergamos was the place where modern medicine takes it's roots. The symbol of the snake entwined staff that you see on medical things is from here. That's asklepios.

So the culture here is ancient and steep. And worship of everything NON-God is deep here.

That's the backdrop of this letter. It isn't easy to be a christian here. We wouldn't last five minutes here, before they ate us up.

*VS. 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:
The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

There's the salutation. Who is the one with the sharp two edged sword?

Chapter 1:V16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

This is Jesus, and we know from Hebrews 4:12 that the word of God that proceeds out of the mouth of Jesus is like a two edged sword.

Hebr. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

We'll see that this introduction has special meaning to it's hearers. There is purpose here.

Now, the commendation: Jesus says, *13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is;

Whoa! These folks live in a tough spot.

Satan is not omnipresent, like the Almighty. He can only be in one place at one time.

I believe that at any given time, Satan makes his throne at the place where the battle between good and evil is the hottest.

When this was written, Paul, and the christians, were turning the settled civilized world upside down with the proclamation of the authority to reign of God.

That news turns Satan's world upside down. He has authority in this cosmos, and along comes Paul, preaching that sins can be forgiven, and that men can cross over from Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom.

A day has come when you can escape the slavery of Satan, and be a slave in God's kingdom. If you happen to be Satan, that's huge!

It didn't look huge to the little band of struggling christians in the ancient polluted city of Pergammum. Bet it's huge to Satan, and pergammum must have been the center of it all. That's where Satan set up his command control point. Satan's throne! False religion! Lots of

it.

13b ...and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells

In the heat of battle, these folks have not shrunk from holding high the banner with Jesus name on it!

Even when Antipas, their Pastor, was brutally murdered, burned to death in a giant bronze cow, they lined up and said, I'll be next, if it means denying Jesus.

Pergammum actually represents a game change in how Satan is going to attempt to defeat his foe, the Lord Jesus.

Any good battle strategist must stand back and see if what he's doing is working. And if it isn't, try something different.

We'll see that kind of a change of course within this letter.

Clearly, persecution was only making the church stronger.

We said at the first, that these letters can loosely represent different era's in the history of the church.

Remember we said that each church was no. 1, a real practicing local church at the time the letter was written. Then we said that there are no.2, Pergamum type churches, that look just like this church looked, same strengths and weaknesses, and then we said there are Pergammum type individual christians, no. 3, and finally, no. 4, we said there was an era in church history, when the church universal looked the most like Pergammum.

That era is roughly from 306 - 600 AD.

What the church faced in that timeframe was that Christianity was declared the state church by Rome.

So Rome quit persecuting you if you were and christian and persecuted you if you were not! That's a disaster!

What happened on the ground is that all of the pagan worship, changed the name on the sign out front, and kept right on with pagan worship. Pagan worship became 'christianized'. All of our holidays, "holy days" came from this era. Pagan rite's of spring, became Easter. etc. etc.

What this did was obliterate christianity as something distinct from the world.

As far as the enemy's battle philosophy, think about what Satan did.

For the first 3 centuries, the distinction of the kingdom of God, versus the kingdom of Satan, was clear. There was a clear line you had to go accross . . . out of Satan's kingdom, into God's kingdom. Out of Satan's authority to reign over you, into God's authority to reign over you.

Many are called but _____ are chosen? How many? few.

So what happens if you strip away those distinctions and declare that everyone WILL BE a christian, or else?

Well, you stripped away all of the distinctions, the distinctiveness of being in God's kingdom and suddenly, Satan is in charge.

What happened? The church was devastated, and never really fully recovered.

All of the pagan god's became . . . saint something or other. Everything stayed pretty much right in Satan's kingdom, but got 'christianized' names.

What did Jesus tell Peter? *You are petra, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*

This move by Satan, was the gates of hell battering the church, and for

all practical purposes, it nearly, nearly did *not* prevail. The church was devastated for 1400 years.

Satan on the throne . . . of the church. The church didn't know what hit it.

All of that so when we go into the condemnation, hopefully, with this background you'll see it clearly. Here goes;

14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel

Do you remember the story of Balaam? Balaam was a prophet for hire. Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam warned Balak that he didn't have power over his prophetic voice and a curse might not come out, but the price was the same.

So this went on 3 times. Every time Balaam tried to curse his countrymen, a blessing came out, and Balak was getting pretty angry about it.

So Balaam came up with a different plan. Here it is. Send in beautiful moabite women, get the israelites, to intermarry, and the intermarriages will corrupt israel.

That's exactly what they did, and it worked perfect. Israelites and moabite women. And guess who's gods they worshipped. Moabite gods. And the whole nation fell into the idolatry of Moab. The religion of moab was basically drunken orgies and feasting.

The picture is a perfect representation of what happened to the church when Constantine declared everyone a christian, or else.

The church married the world. Guess who won. The world.

who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality

The distinctives are gone. Suddenly you can't tell which is the church, and which is the world, because it's all mixed up together.

Idolatry entered the church in this time frame. Immorality was the order of the day.

Win - win for Satan. State church. Centered in Rome. Defiled by Idolatry. Rampant with Immorality.

With apologies to my catholic friends, who I love, this is the beginning of the Papal church. And for the next 2 letters it just gets worse, and then even worse. The harlot church. The dead church.

Vs. 15 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

This is obscure. We don't know exactly who the Nicolaitans were and what the teaching was. It's interesting to have the reference to what he just finished saying. *some who in the same way*

Most scholars will assign traits to this error similar to the marrying the world results. That's the safest interpretation.

Some other folks, Nick brought it up the other night, point out the word etymology, nico - to Lord it over and laity - ordinary folk.

That would certainly fit well with the whole idea of the papal church era. The state ruled over the church and the church ruled over the laity. That's a mess, Jesus said He hates it. That also fits well. Sort of reverse engineering, but it does seem to fit well.

God set things up so that civil government and moral government are separate powers. The separation of church and state, (which has little or

nothing to do with our current argument with folks who want to wipe church off the map) is actually God ordained.

The king of Israel did not overtake the priestly office and offer sacrifices. And the Priestly office did not rule over the kingdom.

So if that's what Nico - Laitans means, Jesus hates it, and it's an evil thing.

But I can't help wondering, and this is far fetched, I'm going out on my limb here, so take what I say, plus \$4.50 cents and buy a gallon of gasoline.

In the era that we're considering tonight, the church was very nearly lost to heretical false doctrine. I mean we came that close to losing it ALL.

The heresy I'm referring to is the Arian heresy. It's still with us today. My good friend who cuts my hair is an Arian.

The church struggled through this heresy from roughly 280'sAD to 386 AD. And there was a point when nearly ALL of the church fathers were on the side of the heresy! Maybe 85%. Maybe more.

The heresy is that Jesus was created of substance by God. Jesus is not eternal like God. Jesus is subservient to God. God through Jesus, created the Holy Spirit who is subservient to Jesus and God.

Trinitarian theology destroyed. God as 3 equal persons, destroyed.

Ultimately, you have Islam. That's where Islam came from. No trinity. God is one. Jehovah's Witnesses and One-ness Pentacostalism are 2 more that come to mind based right here.

We don't realize how close we came. One man, Athanasius, took up the battle, and fought for correct trinitarian theology his entire life. The Nicæan Creed came out of the First Council of Nicæa oddly enough, called by Emperor Constantine. Take that Satan.

That creed after years of struggle, said this:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

[But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]

I can't help but wonder if perhaps the Arians are the Nicolaitans. There's nothing word wise to tie the 2 together. But it's interesting. Well, it is to me.

Then the command:

16 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.'

Remember the introduction from the writer. It's significant. The 2

edged sword. I'll come and fight against you.

The sword of His mouth is the word of God. Their problem is doctrinal. The solution is doctrine. Judgement will be by doctrine.

In a sense their problem remained until the reformation. What was the great cry of Luther and the reformers. Sola Scriptura. Only the scriptures. The sword of Jesus mouth set the church back on track 1200 years later.

Then we see something similar when Jesus comes to judge the earth. I was thinking about this last week as I studied. Remember the flying scrolls in Zechariah 5. Weird, right? Obscure.

Zechariah 5:1 Then I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, there was a flying scroll. 2And he said to me, "What do you see?" And I answered, "I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits." 3Then he said to me, "This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land; surely everyone who steals will be purged away according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears will be purged away according to the writing on the other side. 4 "I will make it go forth," declares the LORD of hosts, "and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name; and it will spend the night within that house and consume it with its timber and stones."

Judgement comes by the word of God. Just those 2 commandments would wipe out all men. We see it again in Revelation 19

*Rev. 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called **The Word of God**. 14And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of*

iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Did anyone at Pergammum repent? There's no record that they did. The warning of war and judgement is not yet satisfied. A day is coming when the prophecy in the warning to Pergammum is going to happen. When Jesus says I'm coming quickly to wage war against you, it will happen, in His time.

The Papal church is still in place. You can trace it to Constantine. Final judgement will be by the sword that comes from Jesus mouth when He comes again. That warning is as good today as it was when it was given in 96 AD.

Judgement comes in phases. The original church died at some point. Then a partial judgement is realized when the Sola Scriptura caused the reformed church, then a final judgement of the church with Satan on the throne will come at Jesus return. Same judgement. Different phases.

Vs. 17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

Who are the overcomers? 1John 5:4 *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

So what is the manna, and the white stone all about?

Exodus 16:33 *So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come"*

John 6:31 *"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"*

32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Jesus is the bread that came down out of heaven. The promise is that I'm going to have Jesus.

The white stone is a little more obscure. Peter said we are living stones

1 Peter 2:5 says; you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I want that manna. I want to be a living stone offering acceptable sacrifices. Hold on little church.

So let's bring this home to us. The church married the world. How do we apply that. Why is it important to us.

Think about the church in America in 2012. Is it distinctive, set apart from, the world?

Or are we marrying the world with embracing the worlds music and a soft gospel that sounds more like "you're OK, I'm OK"

Do our neighbors look at us and say, love 'em or hate 'em, for better or worse, they are different.

Right now Americans are looking at mormonism. Can we have a mormon president. What are the distinctives, and sadly, they're reading up on mormonism because, to our shame, mormonism is more distinct from the world than American Evangelicalism is.

That should make us sad. If an inquisition comes to my town, I want

there to be some good hard evidence that Jim Galli does not play well with the world.