

Remnant Life Church

March 8, 2026

## **The Seven Churches of Revelation:**

### **Pergamum**

Revelation 2:12-17

We continue this morning with the letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor found in the first 3 chapters of the book of Revelation

- We are doing this for 2 reasons
  - The first is to determine what we can learn as a church family in order to embrace and continue those things that Jesus said was right and good
    - As well as guard against falling into the same traps they did which Jesus said He had against them
  - Secondly, we desire to learn the principles taught here for our own personal lives
    - To strengthen our walk, our commitment, and our faith in Jesus Christ

To this point we have read and examined the letter written to the church in Ephesus

- They are the distracted church
- They had gotten so busy, perhaps so comfortable, so complacent that Jesus said they had forsaken their first love
  - Which was their relationship and commitment to Him

The second letter was to the church in Smyrna

- They are the martyred church
- They are surrounded by great wealth and opulence yet they themselves are in poverty
- But they never compromised, never were seduced by the wealth around them
- And Jesus said they were rich even though they were going to suffer

This morning, we come to the third letter written to the church in Pergamum

- Two other spellings and pronunciations are given in the Bible for this single location
  - You may see it as Perganon – an alternative spelling
  - As well as Pergamos – which is the Greek
    - Its name means height or elevation
    - Likely due to the fact that the city was built on top of a high rock outcropping
  - Today, the city of Bergama, Turkey stands on the site
- If Ephesus, with its massive theatre and shops with expensive goods was the New York City of Asia Minor, Pergamum was its Washington
  - It was the seat of Roman imperial power
  - At its center was the earliest temple built for emperor worship – the first being in honor of Caesar Augustus, the emperor at the time of Jesus' birth
    - A singular honor for this political capital city that sat 45 miles north of Smyrna and 75 miles north of Ephesus
    - But there were also many other temples there to the pagan gods of Rome
    - The temple of Zeus was one of the most splendid in its size and beauty

- And it is possible that this is the reason why Jesus refers to Pergamum as being where satan has his throne.
- For a time they even worshipped a living serpent helping us to understand why it was often referred to as satan's city
- But it was also the location of one of the finest libraries of antiquity containing over 200,000 volumes
  - It was the first city that began using parchment to write on
  - Made from animal skin rather than papyrus which is created from plants
  - Ensuring a much longer life for the writings, many of which have survived to modern times

### READ – Revelation 2:12-17

This letter opens with a reference to the words of Jesus being a double-edged sword

- Certainly, this is intended as a symbol that the words of Christ carry the assurance of judgment based on the absolute truth of the Word
  - **Heb 4:12** - *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*
    - God's word is a tool of judgment but also one of the wisdom of truth
  - In addition, this is a direct play on words intended to set the power of God apart and above that of man
    - In that day, the Romans expressed the authority of their government, specifically the governors over their provinces like Pergamum, as the "right of the sword."
    - Jesus reminds the Christians that His Word holds the two-edged sword of ultimate authority
    - There is a good chance the Christians of this region would have been at least familiar with the writings of the author of Hebrews, penned some 20 to 25 years earlier
    - The words of Jesus are the sword of judgment in 2 distinct ways
      - First in discerning the truth (**Heb 4:12**)
      - And second, for punishing evil (**Rom 13:4**)
    - Jesus' words are intended not only to confirm His ultimate authority but also to encourage the church that evil will not go unpunished
- Jesus goes on to commend them saying they did not renounce His name
  - IOW, they remained true and faithful
  - Even in the face of the martyrdom of Antipas
    - This is the only mention of this man
    - He was, by all accounts, the bishop of the Pergamum church
    - Their leader and likely pastor
    - He was put to death during the reign of Emperor Nero who was also on the throne when Peter and Paul were executed
- But there is also a problem within this church that has, unfortunately, become all too common today in many churches

- A comingling of the world with the Word of God
- Through twisted teaching
- Even in the early church there was the need to be cautious of who they were listening to
  - There will always be those who may say they come in truth but their intention is to lie and deceive
    - It is only through the test and measure of God's Word that you can judge their words
  - There are many of those with us today. Famous, successful (by the world's standards...)
  - John wrote of these dangers to the church of Pergamum as well as the church of Ephesus
    - Jesus repeats the importance of enduring the hardships of remaining steadfast in the truth in the face of false teaching
- And Jesus names two false teachings that they are facing
  - In vv 14-15 we read, *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.*
  - Who were the Nicolaitans?
    - This is not an easy question to answer since the only references we have of them in the Bible is verse 6 in the letter to the church in Ephesus and then again here in verse 15.
    - We are able to turn to the writing of an early-church father, Hippolytus, to get more information
      - He identifies them as an early sect who held to the teaching of Balaam
        - They were idol worshippers
        - And practiced all types of immorality and demonic incantations leading to sinful behavior
    - The name Balaam is found in the Bible as well as extra-biblical historical writings
      - Philo, a first-century Jewish writer calls Balaam a great sorcerer
      - We read in Jude 11 that he is described as a false prophet
      - And we read specifically of an encounter God's people had with him
        - *Numbers 31:16 - ... the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD's people.*
- And so, we can see that it was important for the churches in Pergamum and Ephesus to stand firm against the teachings of the Nicolaitans, the followers of Balaam

- It was this sorcerer and false prophet who became a symbol of false teaching in the letters to the 7 churches
    - So too we must be on guard against the false teaching of this time found most strongly in a growing willingness to compromise the truth of the Scripture
  - Jesus then calls on them to repent of this sin in the 16th verse
    - *Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*
    - Be careful to note that this warning is not directly against the Nicolaitans but the people of the church who do not turn from them!
  - Then, as we will read at the close of each of the 7 letters, Jesus says...
    - *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (v 17)*
- This phrase is not unique to this passage or even the book of Revelation
  - Jesus used the same wording in His teaching in Luke 14 as well in Matt 13
  - Its usage addresses a wider audience than just this one church meaning we are called today to heed the same warnings that Jesus spoke to the churches of that day

Finally, Jesus gives 2 promises to those who overcome or repent but their meaning is not obvious

- The first image is an Old Testament reference and the second an image from first-century Rome and would be familiar to the reader
- The first promise is – *I will give some of the hidden manna*
  - Now we recognize the word manna
    - This was the wafer type substance supernaturally provided by God to the children of Israel in order to feed them (Exodus 16)
    - It represents the hand of God providing nourishment to the people
    - In the first case it was physical, but here in Pergamum it is spiritual
      - It is genuine, it is real, it is satisfying
      - Unlike the false teaching, and false gods they had been tempted to follow by the Nicolaitans
    - To worship or give your affections or attention to anything other than the one true God is to starve yourself spiritually
      - Anything you would get from the world's offerings is no better for you than a starving man eating junk food high in refined sugars, salt and chemical additives instead of healthy, natural foods
      - It may abate the hunger but only for a moment and the long-term results are not only unsatisfying but dangerous to your overall health
    - To repent of your worldly affections is to receive the nourishing food of God's manna
      - The Jewish people of Pergamum would have understood this metaphor immediately
- The second promise says this - *I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.*

- In Roman times the small white stone was used in multiple contexts
  - It was given to a victorious athlete in the games
  - It was used in legal matters to determine guilt or innocence
  - And, what this is referring to, is after a serious illness a patient who had fully recovered would often take a new name – symbolized by the small white stone - to mark or embrace his recovery
    - It is thought this is where the phrase, “I feel like a new man!” has its roots
- But more importantly for the Christian, it is the representation of a rebirth in Jesus Christ
  - And for the church in Pergamum, it was a promise that to repent from the false teaching was to take on a new identity in Jesus Christ
    - Paul taught this same theological truth
    - **II Cor 5:17** (NIV) - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*
    - **II Cor 5:17** (NLT) - *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*
- And so in spite of the spiritual harm they may have done, Jesus tells them there can be healing
  - Healing of their hearts and minds from the distortion of sin giving them a new identity in Christ
- And healthy spiritual food provided by God Himself is available through His great mercy, grace, and love

Those things that Pergamum had done well we would be wise to hold to

Those things that Pergamum allowed to lead them astray we must also be on guard against

It really is not as difficult as so many churches and people make it out to be

- Focus and cling to your first love – Jesus Christ
- Keep your priorities in right order with God always first
- Guard what you allow to come into your heart and mind

As we keep these things preeminent in our lives, not only will it be much more difficult for the enemy to lead us astray, but the allure of his temptations will lose their power to draw us away.

- This is what Jesus was calling His early churches and followers to be
- And He is calling us in that exact same way today!