

## ST. PAUL LUTHERAN, CALEDONIA      SUNDAY ADULT CLASS

### REVELATION- CHAPTER TWO PART 2 NOTES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### The Third Letter: Pergamum      Revelation 2:12-17

Pergamum -- a royal city built on a 1,000 foot high rock rising like a mountain out of the plain, 50 miles north of Smyrna. In ancient times it was a city of size and importance. Today is a city of 14,000 called Bergama. It is situated on the north bank of the Caicus, a navigable river. As early as 241 B.C. it was a city of kings and later was the resident city of the Roman Proconsul. Pergamum was noted for its extensive library and paper production. The word "parchment" actually means "of, or pertaining to Pergamum. Marc Antony had moved the library of 250,000 volumes to Alexandria, Egypt, and the residence of the proconsul was moved to Ephesus. Pergamum was a center for Emperor worship. All Roman citizens were required to show their patriotism by burning incense at the foot of Caesars statue while saying, "Caesar is lord!" The penalty for refusing to do so was imprisonment or death. Worship of Athena was also common. Pergamum was also a center for the worship of Zeus. The four-story altar to Zeus could be seen from anywhere in the city. The worship of Asclepius (regarded as the god of medicine) was also centered there. People were attracted from all over the Mediterranean by stories of miraculous healings. A special part of the famous Asclepion was the healing tunnel. Those seeking treatment were given hallucinatory drugs and then led down the steps into the tunnel. The drugged patient was then to walk through the snake infested tunnel. As they did, whispered voices would come through the ceiling telling them, "You will be healed." "All praise to Asclepius who is healing you." "Be healed." History tells us that some were healed, while some died from snake bites. Others emerged from the tunnel hopelessly insane. A small Christian church was founded there, but we don't know by whom.

2:12 Do you remember what angel means? (messenger) To whom does it refer? What is that sharp two-edged sword?

2:13 Pergamum was an especially bad place to be a Christian. The false religions were influential and it is through any false religion that the devil rules. His rule was strong here. The temptations to light a little incense to Zeus or Athena rather than be killed were intense. Sick people could go to the temple of Asclepius.

The fastest way for a Christian to become a martyr was to refuse to worship the emperor. For their continued faithfulness in the midst of all this the Lord praises them. They have, for the most part, been willing to deny their lives before they denied their Lord.

It has been said in our day, When Christians are no longer persecuted by the world in which they live, either the world has been Christianized or the church has been paganized. The church automatically becomes paganized when it fears to make its witness because of what others will say or think about it. How are these forces of fear and paganization influencing the church today? Or have we Christianized our culture?

2:14 The teaching of Balaam -- Balaam was the pagan prophet of the Old Testament who was commanded by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Instead he blessed Israel. (Numbers 22-24). He convinced the Israelites to eat things which had been sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1-2, Exodus 34:14-15). This stumbling block was also cast before the Christians at Pergamum who were eating food sacrificed to idols at social gatherings and taking part in the sex orgies that typified the religious worship of the pagan temples. The symbol of Asclepius was a serpent, the Biblical symbol for the devil. If Christians were not careful about the influence of the society around them on their lives, they might simply dismiss the worship of Asclepius as medical treatment.

Nicolaitans -- the church at Ephesus was praised for resisting this group which taught that one could be Christian and still indulge in the pleasures of the flesh. Pergamum also had a group of these people who were tolerated by the Christians there. Apparently the Christians at Pergamum did not practice church discipline as they should have in an effort to alert these people to their sin and hopefully bring them to repentance.

2:16 So the Lord says, Repent! The sword of His mouth is, again, the law which mercilessly condemns and the Gospel which brings forgiveness to the truly sorry. Repentance is not just being sorry you did something (or that you were caught at it). This is repentance to God from the heart. Such true repentance can be seen in that it always leads to a desire to amend sinful ways.

The messenger or Pastor at Pergamum is here instructed to preach and teach God's Word -- Law and Gospel. There is always a temptation for the pastor to leave out some Word of God that he suspects might offend some people. Remember the parable of the sower - many will hear but not all will believe. And once God's Word is spoken, the law condemning sin and the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ, many will be uncomfortable and leave the church (see Luke 14:16-24). How had the church at Pergamum been paganized?

2:17 To him who overcomes -- perseveres through temptations, and only to him, will I give to eat of the hidden manna. No one can believe for someone else. Each must believe, repent, and overcome for himself. We can and should strengthen one another in this, but in the end the responsibility is personal. If one is not saved it is his own fault. If one is saved by God, then only God gets the credit! Encouragements and blessings for those who remain faithful -- eat of the hidden manna -- in contrast to the meat sacrificed to idols. This is a symbolic term for that which nourishes men's souls here on earth and shall be our only nourishment in heaven. The term "hidden manna" occurs nowhere else in Scripture. These two factors prevent any further explanation.

The white stone- another blessing for faithfulness. White is the symbol of Holiness, stone would have been seen by those familiar with Greek religion as a gift or testimonial of virtue. Such stones were said to be given by the Greek gods. The Roman Emperor also gave stones with gifts written on them which entitled a person to that gift. In ancient Greek law, the casting of a white stone was a vote for acquittal. As it appears here we may understand it as referring to the gift of God's favor and holiness in Christ. The new Name is, of course, Christ's Name.

### **Study and discussion questions for Revelation 2:12-17**

1. The First Apostolic Council, convened in Jerusalem, sent out a letter which outlined the God-pleasing answers to several practical matters troubling the early church. This letter is recorded for us in Acts 15:22-29. Which one of these verses in Acts speaks directly to the problems in Pergamos and how does it address the problem?
2. The Christians at Pergamos were not careful about the influences of non-Christian society in their lives. Yet this is part of overcoming in v. 17. What are some of the non-Christian (anti-Christian) influences in your life and in what ways can you overcome these influences?
3. (for yourself) Refer to Question #4 on the questions for Rev. 2:1-7. 2:17 also speaks of overcoming as does 2:7. Review your work for that question. Have you been following St. Paul's advice so that you may overcome to the end?

## **The Fourth Letter: Thyatira Rev. 2:18-29**

The origin of the church at Thyatira is unknown, but Lydia of Thyatira (Acts 16:14) may have helped Christ's cause there. Thyatira, in what is today central Turkey, was the smallest of the seven cities written to, but we have no idea how large the church was. Its modern name is Akhisar. Thyatira gained its economic prosperity through its location on the main trading route through the Hermes Valley. In addition, Thyatira had become an important manufacturing center, renowned for the quality of its goods. As a result, there were plenty of manufacturing jobs to be had, except if you were a Christian. To have a job in Thyatira's manufacturing trades, it was necessary for you to belong to a guild or union. To be a guild member meant that you had to attend banquets held in pagan temples, and eat meat that had first been offered as a sacrifice to the pagan idol of that temple. The surplus meat was also offered for sale in local meat markets. The Christians therefore faced some important questions. Could Christians attend guild banquets held in pagan temples, even if not doing so meant losing or never getting a job? Could Christians eat meat which had been offered to idols, even if they didn't believe in the idols, and needed the work?

This is the longest of the seven letters. The church there was faithful except on one point of error and apparently many followed this particular error. One called Jezebel in the text had encouraged Christians to compromise with the world. Therefore this letter deals with how Christians relate in and to the world. Today Christianity is not to be found in Thyatira at all. There is one ancient Christian church, but worship there consists of idolatry and worship of the dead who had the money to pay to be buried in the churchyard. The bones of these are taken from the ground after the decay process has been completed and stored in a vault under the church and prayed for.

The church at Thyatira thus becomes an example of how compromise with the culture leads to a degeneration process caused by a persistent failure to recognize God as He truly is. This process can silently and almost invisibly take a believing Christian and reduce him to the most degenerate levels. It is described in detail in Romans 1:20-32. Romans 1:28-31 further describes the attributes of such people. Romans 1:32 states that those who condone such people are also guilty of their sins, even if they don't participate in them.

2:18 This is the only verse in Revelation where the title Son of God appears. Eyes like a flame of fire -- penetrating, judging look of Christ filled with the fire of righteous indignation. Feet like burnished bronze (also Rev. 1:15) -- strong, and able to crush all enemies underfoot. Some within the Thyatiran church are signified as such enemies.

2:19 General commendation for the church which has been faithful even in trials with fruit-producing faith and growth (perseverance) while applying faith to life.

2:20 Christ, Who died for all their sins on the cross out of love for them now finds that He must warn them and may have to eventually destroy them for tolerating error. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, this is one of the most serious sins repeatedly committed by God's people in the name of tolerance.

Jezebel -- Possibly this was the woman's real name, perhaps it is only symbolic. Jezebel in the Old Testament was the wicked idolatrous wife of King Ahab of Israel who seduced the Israelites into pagan worship which included all manner of sexual vices (see 2 Kings 9:22, 30-37). Whether this was the real name of the woman causing trouble in Thyatira or is a symbolic name cannot be decided due to lack of further information. But this does not change the meaning in her heart she was indeed a Jezebel for God's people.

Things sacrificed to idols -- a common temptation as Christians socialized with non-Christians and let their non-Christian friends speak louder in their hearts than the Lord Jesus. (See comments in the last lesson under Rev. 2:14.) The pattern in Thyatira was typical and illustrates why toleration of error is such a great sin. Christians who would not tolerate people eating food sacrificed to idols within the church, would not be likely to tolerate open immorality among church members. But it is a short step from tolerating within the church those who eat food sacrificed to idols, to doing so yourself. One might never, themselves, serve food sacrificed to idols, but might do so when visiting another members home, just for that sake of toleration. This would be a limited participation in sin. Then it becomes only another small step to tolerating and finally participating in sexual immorality, a full participation in sin. And it was simple toleration that made it all possible (note again Romans 1:32).

2:21 The Lord desired her repentance but she would not; her heart was hardened against the Lord. Being hardened (caused by ignoring His Word), she was able to find all sorts of reasons for not heeding the only true and living God, who would crush her (see 2 Peter 3:8-9).

2:22 Her bed of passion shall be refashioned by the judging Lord into a bed of sickness. Great trouble shall come from the Lord's Hand upon those who have tolerated and/or followed her, unless they repent of her ways. We are all personally responsible before God for our actions, and even the sinful things we tolerate we cannot blame our faults or sins on circumstances, someone else, medical factors, heredity, or parents. The Lord provides these things and along with them the resources to responsibly deal with them, if we desire.

2:23 Here is the Law -- condemnation for Jezebel's spiritual children (followers) death. It does not matter if a person has been Jezebel's chief helper or just mentally (not condoned but just) tolerated her. Jezebel's activities were probably seen as socially acceptable. Greek culture at this time was much more enlightened than ours. Homosexuality was considered not only stylish, but a virtue. But with the Lord, cultural standards don't matter. Judgment is certain, according to deeds which show the real condition of the heart. Rom 6:23 The wages of sin is death. As Romans 2:1-11 makes clear, we can either be judged by our own works, or by the works of Jesus Christ.

2:24 Apparently some neither participated nor tolerated these errors of Jezebel and for it they were doubtlessly spoken evil of. Evil never tolerates the true things of God.

Satan's so-called deep secrets Apparently Jezebel's religion was marketed as one of the mystery religions which were so popular in those days. As a follower worked his way through the religion he would be rewarded with deep and mysterious secrets which would better enable him to achieve some eternal goal (as the Rosicrucians and many of the Lodges do today).

In this we see why God's Word is our only sure guide. God's revealed religion lays everything out before a person and does not seem mysterious at all. But enemies of God's revealed religion have their own prophets. This has always been a problem, especially for the church, even in the Old Testament. Jeremiah 23:21 "I have not sent these prophets yet they ran, I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

2:25-26 Christ calls the faithful to perseverance which includes overcoming (see comments in the last lesson under Rev. 2:17) and promises rich reward.

Authority over the nations -- those who are God's children in Christ already own the earth all other people are trespassers. This shall become more evident as the faithful continue to do the Lords will, which is what we mean by living in faith. When the earthly life of the faithful is completed they join Christ in His rulership over the universe.

2:27-29 Part of this rulership includes judgment backed by the authority of the Father. Just as God's Gospel of salvation is sure to all who repent, so His law is sure to all those who do not repent. The Gospel is the sure promise of forgiveness and salvation to all who repent. The Law is the sure word of judgment and death to all who do not. The righteous in Christ shall be part of this process. We are prepared for this work by God through a life of living faith. Obviously those who come now and then, or even regularly and give their dollar a week -- but have no real relationship with the Lord -- are unfit for salvation or this work until they repent.

The morning star -- Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16) which signifies not only Christ as we now know Him, but a much closer, warmer, more intimate relationship with Christ. This the true believer never fails to desire.

### **Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation 2:18-29**

1. Based on 2:19 and Romans 7:18-25, what is the relationship of a saving faith to action?

2. To the world the toleration of differing ideas is a virtue. What does God say of tolerating ideas which are different from His?

3. What does God desire of those who have ideas which are different from His? (v.21)

What is our part in this process?

4. While the world demands toleration of its ideas, especially when those ideas are different than Gods, in what ways does the world refuse to tolerate Gods ideas?

5. How does sin affect ones relationship with the Morning Star?

What is the remedy for sins effect on that relationship?