

Spiritual Maturity

The Church at Pergamos: Compromising Faith

- * Pergamos was a rich and powerful city of ancient Greece about 16 miles from the Aegean Sea in what is present day western Turkey.
- * During the Hellenistic Period (around 300 B.C.) it was the capitol city of the Kingdom of Pergamos ruled by King Attalid.
- * Attalid later made a peace treaty with Rome and the region became a part of the Roman Empire.
- * Pergamos had the second largest library on antiquity, second only to Alexandria.
- * Mark Anthony was said to have given it to Cleopatra as a wedding gift.
- * The word parchment is actually derived from the name “Pergamon”.
- * It was known for architecture and pagan worship with multiple temples to various gods.
- * In 29 B.C. permission was given for the first temple for the worship of Ceaser!
- * There were temples to Athena, Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and Zeus, the king of kings!
- * Pergamos was also a great “medical center” or better said “healing center”!
- * A pagan priest would give a “concoction” to a patient who would sleep in a large underground room. While sleeping, nonpoisonous snakes would crawl around on them. The patient would have dreams about their medical condition and its diagnosis and how to remedy it.
- * It is said this is why that today the medical symbol are two serpents around a staff!!
- * The conquest of Alexander the Great in that part of the world cause the same culture and language to exist which greatly helped the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ!!!
- * Pergamos boasted one of the seven (7) wonders of the ancient world. The Altar of Zeus! Zeus was called the “King of Kings”. Sound familiar?
- * In John’s letter, Jesus calls this “the place where satan has his throne”

Revelation 2:12-17 (NIV)

12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. **13** 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.

14 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**. **15** Likewise, you also have those who hold to the **teaching of the Nicolaitans**. **16** Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 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. The first thing you notice in Jesus’ comments to Pergamos was that it was called the place **“where satan has his throne”!**
 - A. The word “throne” comes from a word used to describe a specific chair in a house where the “man of the house” would sit. What we might call “dad’s easy chair” today!
 1. What Jesus seems to be saying is that Pergamon was a place where satan felt at ease! Comfortable. A place of position. A place of prominence or control!
 2. We see this in the pagan temples of worship and the practices of society!
 3. In the midst of this Christians are practicing their faith in the “one true God”!
 - B. You will recall his alluding to “Antipas” who was put to death.
 1. Antipas was the Bishop of the Church in Pergamos.
 2. He was ordained by the Apostle John.
 3. He refused to worship Ceasar as god!

4. He was martyred at the Temple of Zeus in what was called “The Brazen Bull”.
5. A person was put inside and a fire built under it and the victim was roasted alive. Antipas refused to bow to the pressure of the world in denying his Lord!!
6. That’s why this letter to Pergamon is called the letter to the “Compromising Church”!

II. Jesus then says some where holding to **“the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans”**.

A. So what is the **“bottom line”** Jesus is referring to here in Pergamos?

1. First, it is worthy to note what Jesus says to the Church in Ephesus about the Nicolaitans!

Revelation 2:6 (NIV)

6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which

2. This is strong language from our Lord so lets consider why!!!
3. The Greek word Jesus uses here is: **abhor, to find utterly repulsive.**
4. This is obviously strong language!!!! How many times do we ever see Jesus saying He hates something???

B. “Nicolaitan” is a reference back to the belief system of one of the deacons in scripture.

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

The Choosing of the Seven

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn

this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and **Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.** **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

1. Let's first acknowledge how important it is for us to structure ministry according to peoples gifting and callings!
2. Notice they needed some to “pray and teach” and some to “wait on tables”!
3. This is where we see the “ministry of the deacon”!
4. So we gather from here that Nicolas was a deacon chosen to serve the early church!
5. The word “Nicolaitan” is derived from the Greek word “nikolaos”
6. Interestingly enough this is a compound of the words “nikos” and “laos”.
7. **“Nikos” means to conquer or subdue.**
8. **“Laos” is the greek word for people.**
9. From word meanings as well as history we know that the Nicolaitans were “strong arming” and dealing harshly with the people of the early church!!
10. This is what **Jesus says He hates!**

C. The Nicolaitans were spiritual decedents of Nicolas or in other words he trained the church leaders **HOW** to deal with folks!

1. We obviously know a little about Steven. He was “full of the Holy Spirit”.
2. We know that Philip later became an evangelist!
3. We know little of Prohorus. It is believed that this is a “nickname” which revealed his position in theatre and dance!
4. Nicanor was said to be “filled with the Spirit and with wisdom”. He is never mentioned again in scripture.
5. Timon was known for the same but was never mentioned again.

6. Parmenas was known for his faithful service but never mentioned again.
7. The first thing that is mentioned about Nicolas was that He “was a proselyte of Antioch”. He was not born a Jew but was born in paganism and converted to Judaism. He then converted to christianity.
8. The other six deacons came from Hebrew ancestors but Nicolas did not. He was pagan.....or, a non believer.
9. Much is known about him: A **free-thinker, open to new ideas, about to switch and change as needed! Considered a compromiser!**

D. According to early church records Nicolas **taught a doctrine of compromise.**

1. He was known for “inter-mingling” his faith with the “**ways of the world**”!!!
2. Remember, he lived in Pergamos! There were plenty of opportunities to “inter-mingle” your faith with lots of things!
3. This led to **a weak version of Christianity!!!!!!**

III. Question: Are we living and practicing a **compromised faith??????**

A. This is a question only you can answer!!!

1. Does Jesus have **all of you?**
2. Does He have:
 - a) your love and passion
 - b) do you spend time with Him
 - c) does His standards govern your life
 - d) do you love and study His Word
 - e) do we look, think and act like Him

B. You may have noticed we haven't mentioned “the doctrine of Balaam”.

1. Balaam was known for being a “prophet for hire”. He would hire out to preach and prophecy.

2. In other words he was “in it for the money”!
3. His preaching was a job and a profession!
4. Jesus loves and cares for His Bride, the Church! He gave Himself to us and for us!

John 10:11-13 (NIV)

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

5. He really doesn't like it when we do not treat the church well or treat each other badly!
6. He said.....**He hates it!!**

* Some other interesting things to note:

1. In the 19th century, the Germans disassembled the altar of Zeus and took it back to Berlin.
2. It was reassembled and placed in The Pergamon Museum in 1930.
3. It is said to have been “what inspired Hitler” in his rise to power!
4. This unearthing of the altar of Zeus began in 1871, the same year Germany became a nation.
5. The altar was finished being excavated in 1889 the year Hitler was born!