

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 22:8:2010

Reading: Revelation 2:12-17

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE LUKEWARM

### 4. THE FALTERING CHURCH

A special edition of Time Magazine, entitled, “*Beyond The Year 2000, What To Expect In The Next Millennium,*” gives us a glimpse into the near future. As Time’s editors and sociologists projected into the future, the view was not a very pretty one. What will our culture look like ? Where are we headed as a society ? Here are some of the things they spoke of.

**(1) MULTIPLE MARRIAGES:** ‘ *The family as we know it will soon die,*’ they predicted. Replacing it will be marriages, or what will soon be ‘ *serial monogamy.*’

**(2) WIDESPREAD DIVORCE:** “ *Divorce will be so common as to be considered normal.*”

**(3) WOMEN LIVING TOGETHER:** “ *Many women will live with other women.*”

**(4) INCEST:** “ *The taboo against incest will weaken.*”

**(5) CHILD ABUSE:** ‘ *Children will be routinely victimized and will be bounced from home to home as families splinter and reform and splinter and reform.*’

**(6) SEXUAL EXPLOSION:** ‘ *Paediatricians will teach children about the use of family planning at the time of their vaccinations against disease.*’

**(7) ATHEISM:** ‘ *Theology, the study of God and the Bible will soon die.*’

**(80) FEMINISM:** ‘ *The triumph of feminist religion will cause many to shun references to God in personal masculine terms. No more Heavenly Father.*’

My .... are we not already there ? Are we not living in an era where the culture is becoming increasingly hostile to Biblical values and morality ? *Are we not now living at Hell’s headquarters ?* Is this not where the church at Pergamos lived ? For the Lord says, “ *I know thy works and where thou dwellest even where Satan’s seat or throne is.*” ( 2:13 ) Here was a church that occupied the same neighbourhood as the devil. They served under the dark shadow of Satan’s throne. The smell of Satanic influence was everywhere in Pergamos. *It was as if the devil’s bread was being baked in every bakery and right in the middle of his hellish city, was a little colony of heaven, called the church at Pergamos.* Pergamum as the Greeks called it wasn’t an easy place to live, yet that’s where God planted this church. Pergamos was situated about 55 miles north of Smyrna and located about 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was not on any of the major trade routes. Yet as its ancient capital, Pergamum was considered Asia’s greatest city.

It survives today as the Turkish city of Bergama. It was ***Renowned for its Library:*** it had one of the most famous libraries in the world. The library grew to 200,000 volumes before it was shipped to Egypt by Cleopatra. It was ***Respected for its Authority:*** it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Here the Roman Governor had his seat of residence and

he was the one man who had what the Romans called "the power of the sword of life and death." It was ***Remembered for its Idolatry:*** A 1,000 foot high hill overlooked the city and was covered with pagan temples, shrines and altars. Zeus, Athena, Dionysios and Asclepias each had temples built there. A huge altar to Zeus, the greatest of all Greek deities, had been built there in the form of a throne. Moreover, Emperor worship had its strongest grip here. ***You see, the worship of the Roman Emperor was the ecumenical movement of the day uniting all religions.*** Emperor worship became the agent of satanic power to destroy any witness for Christ. The challenge was clear, it must be either Caesar or Christ. How was this assembly getting on? What was Christ's assessment of them?

### (1) THE CONDITION OF THIS CHURCH

The Risen Lord begins with a word of encouragement. "I know." ( 2:13 ) Christ is saying, "I know exactly where you're living. I know what you're going through. I've been there. And I highly respect and value your faith in Me." The Risen Lord **knew** what living in the shadow of Satan meant. From the time of His birth, Satan began nipping at His heels. After forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus fought Satan head to head. All the artillery of hell was levelled at Christ. All the way to the cross, the Devil opposed and stirred up persecution against Christ. Now the Risen Lord says to the church at Pergamos, "I know."

**(a) Christ knew all about this church SOCIALLY:**

He says, "I know .... even where Satan's seat is." ( 2:13 ) That word "seat," is throne. Satan had his throne in Pergamos. The devil is not Omnipresent. As a created being he can be in only one place at a time. He is "the prince of the power of the air," ( Eph 2:2 ) and as such no doubt he has a throne somewhere in the heavenlies. He is also "the prince of this world," ( Jn 12:31 ) and as such he has a throne somewhere on earth. In John's day it was at Pergamos. "Satan's throne," means the place where his evil authority is most exercised. Now why was Pergamos "Satan's throne?" Was it because a large altar had been erected to Zeus, the greatest of all the Greek deities? Was it because Pergamos, was the centre of worship of Asclepias, the snake god. Or may be it was because Pergamos was the *regional centre of Emperor Worship*? In other cities the citizens gave public testimony to Caesar's deity once a year. But here, a pinch of incense burned in worship of the Emperor was an every day occurrence. ***I mean how would you liked to have lived for the Lord at Pergamos? The place where Satan exerted his greatest power and influence?***

Now do you see that word "dwestest," it is interesting. When the New Testament speaks of a Christian "dwelling," anywhere in this world it uses a Greek word ( *paroikein* ) which describes a temporary residence in contrast with a permanent residence. This word is used of a "stranger and pilgrim." But that's not the word that is used here. ( *katoikein* ) The word that is used here speaks of "residence in a permanent and settled place." What Christ is saying to these believers is "You're living in at hell's headquarters

*and you have to go on living there, you cannot pack your bags and move off to some other place where its easier to be a Christian. In Pergamos you are, in Pergamos you must stay.*” My .... where do you live ? Work ? Serve ? Are you living in an unsympathetic home ? Are you working in a hostile environment ? What about the place where you serve the Lord ? Do you feel it’s dominated by the “ *powers of darkness* ?” Are you studying in some place where Christ is humanised and man is deified ? Do you live or work in a place where the power of Satan is rampant ? My .... Christ says to you this .... “ ***I know.***” He knows where you work, and you are most probably where the Lord wants you to be. For God has put you where you are that you might be a witness for Him. I mean, where is the light most effective ? In the darkest corner ! ***Is this not what the Lord does with us*** ? Wherever it is the darkest, the most wicked, ungodly, un-Christlike place, there the Lord puts us. But “ *Preacher, the place where I work is a terrible environment, I am only the Christian there, and all they do is curse and tell dirty jokes. Surely, the Lord does not want me to put up with all that* ?” My .... I wonder, has the Lord put you there to shine for Him ?

***(b) Christ knew all about this church SPIRITUALLY:***

J. Ralph Grant says that Pergamos was “ *Hell’s Headquarters.*” Here they were living at hell’s headquarters and that meant they had to be faithful and they were. They had been tempted to give in but they had stood firm. They were loyal to the **Person of Christ:** Do you see what the Saviour says ? “ *thou*

*holdest fast my name.*” ( 2:13 ) His name stands for Himself. It is the revelation of who Christ is and what Christ has done. It represents the fullness of his divine human person and saving work. In a city where, there was there much to prise them loose they had firmly held to the conviction that Christ is both Lord and Saviour, and they never let go. They were loyal to the **Precepts of Christ:** “ *And hast not denied my faith.*” ( 2:13 ) They would not deny *His Virgin Birth, His Virtuous Life, His Vicarious Death, His Victorious Resurrection, His Visible Return.* In the midst of a city which proclaimed false gods, they declared the true God. The cry of the citizens of Pergamos was “ *Asclepias is the Saviour,*” but the cry of the saints was “ *Jesus Christ is Saviour.*”

They had seen faithfulness ( Antipas ) and they had shown faithfulness. The epitaph on the tomb of Dr. Bob Jones Senior reads, “ ***A fight well fought, a race well run, a faith well kept, a crown well won.***” This could have the epitaph of these believers. Indeed, ought this not to be the epitaph of every believer ? Have you ever heard about “ ***Old Faithful,***” in Yellowstone Park, U.S.A. ? It gets its name from the fact that it follows a dependable time schedule ? Every 65 minutes, it shoots a stream of boiling water over 170 feet into the air ?

Wouldn’t you like to be known as “ ***old faithful,***” in relation to the Incarnate Word of God, and the Inspired Word of God ? My .... do these early believers not challenge us ? Here they were living in a hostile city yet they were bold in their witness for Christ. We live in favourable surroundings yet often we’re tongue-tied when it comes to speak for Christ. In that place where

the name of Christ is met with contempt are you ashamed to confess Him ? (a) (b)

**(c) Christ knew all about this church  
SACRIFICIALLY:**

Look if you will at ( 2:13 ) The name Antipas means “ *against all,*” or “ *against everything,*” and that’s precisely what he did. In his defence of the faith, he stood against all. Here was a man who was willing to stand against everyone and everything if they stood against Christ. The Lord calls him “ *my faithful martyr,*” ( 2:13 ) the same phrase that is used to describe Christ in ( 1:5 ) You see, Antipas faithfully represented Christ in Pergamum, and it cost him dearly. He “ *was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*” ( 2:13 )

“ *Among you,*” makes the slaying graphic. Robertson translates it, “ *by your side.*” It would appear that the other believers were present at his martyrdom. Legend tells us that he was killed by being roasted to death in a brazen bull. Someone once said to John Knox, “ *If you take a stand for Jesus Christ, all the world will be against you.*” Do you know what Knox said ? “ *Then I will just have to be against all the world.*” What issues are worth giving your life for ? In what do you believe so passionately that you would be willing to lay down your life ?

A wise Christian knows which battles are worth fighting. A faithful Christian will do so. (c) Do you know something ? The Lord knows all about your loss. Could it be in recent days that you have experienced loss, ? The loss of a job, a spouse, a parent ? My .... He

knows, cares, understands. (1) Now if you look at ( 2:14 ) you’ll notice the tone changes.

**(2) THE COMPROMISE IN THIS CHURCH**

Despite their steadfastness, sin had slipped in undetected. Their real danger was not with *Persecution from without but it was from Perversion from within.* If Satan can't defeat a church he'll join it. Error had crept in and the Risen Lord was concerned for the **truth.** The Risen Lord *Loves the truth, Speaks the truth and He is the truth.* ( Jn 8:31 14:6 18: 37 ) It seems at Pergamos most were continuing to walk in the truth but some had wandered into the by-path of error and the Chief Shepherd was grieved both by the *Waywardness of the Minority and the Indifference of the Majority.* While many in the Christian realm today, make light of doctrine, and biblical and theological error are viewed as unimportant, that is the not the perspective of the Lord of the church. My .... our Lord holds it against any in His church who hold to error. ***There’s a lesson we need to learn about liberalism.*** Whether it is liberalism in a denomination, or liberalism in a church, wherever you find liberalism, somewhere lurking beneath the shadows you’ll find compromise. Now what was this compromise all about ? Well, it was,

**(a) DOCTRINAL IN ITS SUBSTANCE:**

You see, there were two problems that confronted this church. There was “ *the doctrine of Balaam,*” which said, “ ***Let’s be more relaxed in our loyalties.***” There was “ *the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,*” which said,

***“ Let’s be more restricted in our leadership.”*** There was,

### **1. The Problem of Moral Laxity:**

Some were holding the “ *doctrine of Balaam.*” ( 2:14 ) Who was Balaam ? What did he teach ? During the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings, Gods chosen people defeated the Ammorites, and Moab looked to be the next to fall. When Balak, the King of Moab received a report that the Israelites were advancing his way, he knew there was no way his army could defeat Israel. In desperation Balak called on Balaam for help. The King said, “ *I've got a job for you. I want you to curse these people. And I'll make it worth your while.*” So Balaam sold his gift for profit. Three times he tried to curse the people of God. But each time only blessings, not cursing came out. ( Num Ch 22-24 ) So he devised an ingenious plan. If he could not *Curse* them, his only hope was to get **God** to do so. So he hatched a plot. Do you what it was ? **Women.** The plot was *Women.* ( Num 25:1-3 31:16 ) The word “ *stumbling block,*” ( *skandalon* ) ( 2:14 ) is interesting. It means a trap set with a bait. Balaam instructed Balak to place sensuous women before the marching Israelite army. He did and they wilted. Before they knew they lay down with dogs and got up with the devils fleas. Soon they went to church with these heathen women and worshipped their idols. The result ? God slew 24,000 Israelite men. ( Num 25:9 )

You see, the doctrine of Balaam is to compromise with the world. It's the mixing of holy things with unholy

things. It's having one foot in the church and one foot in the world. We've got people today who tell us to “ ***user friendly.***” They tell us that we need to be more like the world. We need to talk the world's language, sing the world's music, adopt the world's methods, visit the world's places, because if we don't relate then somehow we are not relevant. Well, I agree with Dr. Vance Havner who said, “ ***You do not have to dress like a clown to witness to a circus.***” Havner said, “ ***The church has become so worldly and the world so churchy you cannot tell the two apart.***” Instead of lifting the standard we have lowered the standard. “ *But we are saved, we are eternally secure, we are free in Christ, do we need to go to extremes ? What harm is there going to the disco ? To the pub ? What harm is a little social drink ? What's wrong with sex before marriage and outside of marriage ?*” Is that your thinking ? Well, let me warn you. It's all right for the boat to be in the water, but it's perilous to get the water into the boat. 1.

### **2. The Problem of Ministerial Authority:**

“ *The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.*” ( 2:15 ) The word Nicolaitan means “ *to conquer or dominate the people.*” Some think this was the beginning of the distinction between clergy and laity. The tragedy was that the assembly, instead of rejecting both teaching and teachers, was tolerating the teachers. While the Balaamite teaching turned the spiritual liberty of believers into licence, the Nicolaitan teaching turned the scriptural leadership of believers into clericalism. My .... do you realise that there is a pattern in the New

Testament ? What's the pattern ? That the church should be governed, by a plurality of elders. ( Acts 14:23  
1 Pet 5:2 ) (a)

**(b) SATANICAL IN ITS SOURCE:**

The source of this error was Satan. You see, Satan's throne was at Pergamos. The implication is clear. Satan was the *source* of the errors to which some of these people had succumbed. The Devil hadn't been able to *destroy* them by coming as the roaring lion ( Antipas was proof of that ) so he *deceived* them through false teaching. Someone has said, "***there are two means by which the influence of the church may be defeated and her distinctions obliterated. The one is Persecution, the other is Amalgamation. The World may destroy the church by slaying its members or by making them worldlings.***"

**(c) PROPHETICAL IN ITS SCOPE:**

We can look at the churches *prophetically* ( 1:3 ) and Pergamos suggests to us that period between 315-590 AD. Do you know what Pergamos means ? "***Marriage.***" You see, during this time the church and state were wedded together. One of the key individuals during this period was Constantine. He was made Emperor in 306 AD by his dying father and the Roman troops. In 313 AD he signed the edict of *Toleration* which granted freedom to Christians. It then became fashionable to join the church. He promised gold pieces and white robes to all converts. Soon pagans had

joined the church by thousands bringing with them their heathen practices. The church then became so *worldly* and the world so *churchy* that no difference could be seen. It was during this time that many unscriptural doctrines were introduced.

**(1) Saying prayers for the dead: ( 300 ) (2) Making the sign of the cross: ( 300 ) (3) The worship of saints and angels: (4) The institution of the mass: ( 394 ) (5) The worship of Mary: ( 431 ) (6) The doctrine of Mary: ( 593 )** My .... during this period in the church's history the world infiltrated the church and the church became wedded to the world. What about us today ? Has the teaching of Balaam not affected us ? Hoaratus Bonar said, "***I looked for the church I found it in the world, I looked for the world I found it in the church.***"

**(3) THE CHALLENGE TO THIS CHURCH**

You see, Christ could not allow such evil to go unjudged in a local assembly, so He challenges them,

**(a) TO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE:**

The entire church is called upon here to "*repent,*" either of holding to this heresy or of allowing it to be spread. Christ says, "*Repent or else.*" ( 2:16 ) His Coming here is not the *Rapture*. He's talking about a *Rupture*. This is a threat. This does not refer to His Second Coming, but to a special coming in judgment to this particular church. Such a judgment fell on Balaam ( Num 22:23 31 25:5 31:8 ) And such a severe

discipline will come against the Balaamites in this church. The church must deal with sin, or Christ will come and deal with the church. We are to be *Guardians of the Truth*. We are to maintain the *Purity of the Church* and how are we to do that ? “ *With the sword of His mouth.*” The Word of God. My .... when a church quits standing by the Word of God, God will quit standing by that church. Like some in Pergamos are you struggling with sin and worldliness ? Are you slipping down its slope right now ? In what areas are you compromising ? Doctrine ? Marriage ? Business ? Repent.

**(b) TO EXPERIENCE BLESSING:**

“ *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*” ( 2:17 ) That is to all who withstand false doctrine and walk uncompromisingly in God’s sight, the Risen Lord promises three things. Hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name. Does that not indicate that we will.

**1. Enjoy Spiritual Food:**

You see, Christ is the true manna, the living bread that comes down from above ( Jn 6:35 ) How much has been hidden from us that we would love to know. Thirty years of living Nazareth that delighted the heart of God. Of those years we know so little. Are they the “ *hidden manna,*” that God will one day share with His people ?

**2. Enjoy Sacred Fellowship:**

Tatford suggests that “ *the white stone,*” were those which wealthy families gave to close friends with the donor’s name on it. The person who had this stone could always claim a warm welcome and hospitality from the donor. Think of this. Feeding on Christ and fellowshiping with Christ, will be your portion if you do not compromise.

**(c) TO EXPOUND TRUTH:**

Is this not the theme of this letter ? The Risen Lord is deeply concerned that the truth be *Preserved and Proclaimed*. Do you see how He reveals Himself to this church ? “ *He which hath the sharp sword with two edges.*” ( 2:12 1:16 ) We all know that sword is the Word of God. ( 19:15, 21 ) This church was tolerating false teachers and they needed to be reminded that there is an unchanging standard, the two-edged sword, the Word of God by which God measures all truth. They must defend and declare sound doctrine. What an age we are living in. In this era we are told, “ ***Let us drown our doctrinal differences in the ocean of brotherly love. It does not matter what you believe, let’s hold hands, and build bridges. Let’s walk the ecumenical road together.***” Is this how you think ? Well, the Lord of the Lamp-stand’s does not share your lack of doctrinal concern. You see, if the first mark of a true church is love ( Ephesus ) If the second mark is Suffering, ( Smyrna ) then the third mark is Truth. ( Pergamos )

Love becomes sentimental if it is not strengthened by truth and truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love. My .... we need to preserve the balance of the Bible which tells us to hold the truth in love.

( Eph 4:15 ) Are you doing that ? In these days of *compromise* are you earnestly contending for the faith ?

In these days of *challenge* are you passionately proclaiming the truth, even though you live at hell's headquarters ?