

Jesus and His Church (3): Pergamum

(Revelation 2:12-17)

I. Introduction

- A. In 1961, Yale researcher Stanley Milgram began a series of social experiments
1. The study supposed was about how people learn under situations of stress
 - a. Volunteer read series of words; second was to memorize correct pairs
 - b. When the 2nd volunteer gave a wrong answer, the first would shock them
 - c. For each wrong answer, the voltage would increase up to 300 volts
 2. Actually, there was no electroshock machine or second volunteer
 - a. Real study was about how we follow authority even if conflicts w/ beliefs
 - 1) This was at time of Adolph Eichmann Nazi trials (*just follow orders*)
 - 2) Milgram wondered how people were programmed to follow orders
 - b. In his studies, people followed the instructions of researcher in lab coat
 - 1) They could hear the volunteer scream, and they wanted to stop study
 - 2) But they continued when encouraged and prodded by the researcher
 - c. About 2/3 gave a 300 volt jolt to a stranger— *were just following orders*
 3. We are conditioned to follow what we are told even when we know better.
- B. Maybe that explains something of the struggle we have as Christians
1. We know (*theoretically*) there's a basic animosity between God and world
 - a. Not “*world*” as “*God so loved*” but its basic principles, standards, values
 - b. Those opposed Jesus, and they stand opposed to us too (**John 15:18-19**)
 2. The NT warns us not to conform to those principles, standards & values
 - a. **Paul**: “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world*” (**Rom 12:2**)
 - b. **Peter**: “*Do not conform to evil desires you had when lived in ignorance*” (**1 Pt 1:14**)
 - c. **John**: “*Do not love the world or anything in the world*” (**1 John 2:15**)
 - d. **James**: “*to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*” (**Jam 4:4**)
 3. Those principles, standards & values are the accepted authority around us
 - a. The guy in the lab coat is telling us what to do... loudly and often
 - b. We listen to worldly principles, standards, values as if it were authority.
 - c. Where we live impacts us; that was a problem for church at Pergamum

- C. We have been looking at “*Jesus and His Churches*” from Revelation 2-3
1. Revelation begins with a 7 letters from Jesus to 7 churches in Asia Minor
 - a. These churches were targets of Rome’s persecution... or soon would be
 - b. The rest of Book of Revelation will address that persecution (**Rev 17:14**)
 - c. These 7 letters focus on the churches themselves—good, bad, ugly
 2. Our first lesson focused on the image of Christ from Revelation 1.
 - a. Vision showed a Christ with blazing eyes walking among His church
 - b. He knew what was happening; persecution had not taken Him by surprise
 - 1) He started the letter to Ephesus, “*I know your deeds.*” Jesus knows.
 - 2) But to the church at Pergamum he begins, “*I know where you live.*”
 - c. Pergamum had problems because of where they lived. So do we.

II. I Know Where You Live

- A. The cities of the 7 churches of Asia are located what amounts to a postal route
1. The city that was nearest to Patmos was Ephesus, the first of the 7 letters
 - a. The other of the letters in Revelation follow that circular postal route
 - b. Pergamum is the northern-most city, located 55 miles north of Smyrna
 2. What a tourist to Pergamum would have noticed first was pagan temples
 - a. There was an immense acropolis that rose 1000 ft above the city
 - 1) At the center was an altar to Zeus, the most important Greek god
 - 2) There was also impressive temple to Athena, the goddess of wisdom
 - b. Pergamum was the center of worship of Asclepius, the god of healing
 - 1) His symbol was a caduceus, the serpent that is symbol of medicine
 - 2) It was thought touching the idol of those serpents would heal disease
 - c. So Pergamum was an important first century center of pagan worship
 3. Jesus says here that Pergamum is “*where Satan has his throne*” (**v. 13**)
 - a. He mentions a martyr named “Antipas” who was killed in Pergamum
 - b. We really don’t know wnything about Anitpas other than what is here/.
 - 1) Tradition says he was burned to death inside a giant bronze bull idol
 - 2) No wonder Jesus calls Pergamum the city “*where Satan lives.*”
 - c. And yet the church there remained faithful despite pagan worship

- B. The threat of paganism wasn't only persecution—there was emulation
1. Jesus accuses them “*holding to*” (literally “*seize or grab*”) two different
 - a. Some at Pergamum were grabbing “the *teaching of Balaam*” ([v. 14](#))
 - b. Others there were holding onto “*teaching of the Nicolaitans*” ([v. 15](#))
 - 1) Nicolaitans were false teachers who were opposed in Ephesus ([2:6](#))
 - 2) We don't know teachings, tho they're mentioned by church fathers
 - c. The teachings of Balaam and Nicolaitans are likely the same basic error
 2. The error was like that of Balaam (*guy who had the chat with his donkey*)
 - a. Remember how Balaam was paid by Balak of Moab to curse Israel
 - b. He couldn't, but if they sent Moabite prostitutes, God would curse Israel
 - c. The sin was, “*food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality*”
- C. Apostles told Gentile converts to avoid meat sacrificed to idols ([Act 15:29](#))
1. But that teaching was interpreted in different ways at different places.
 - a. Some thought they had to avoid all meat altogether (debate in Rome)
 - b. While Paul argued that food is food, he warned of dangers in paganism
 - 1) He warned believers avoid sacrificial meals at \shrines ([1 Cor 10:20](#))
 - 2) Its OK to eat pagan ham, but we must avoid pagan entanglements.
 2. But at Pergamum, those pagan entanglements were being accepted
 - a. Like Balaam, the church was taught to adopt/accept a pagan life-style
 - b. Evidently, these Nicolaitans taught that morality doesn't matter much
 - c. Christians best protection from pagan world was to live like pagan
- D. The world of the believer in Pergamum was a world that was hard on faith.
1. They lived in Satan's very own backyard. Jesus admitted that... twice!
 - a. They didn't give up on faith; Jesus commends them for believing.
 - b. Even in the face of real persecution, their belief in Jesus was strong.
 2. What they were willing to give up was the holiness of following God.
 - a. If we can't beat them, join them. When in Rome (or Pergamum)...
 - b. So that world became the guy in the lab coat telling them what to do!
 - 1) They were listening to the world's principles, standards, values
 - 2) And compromising with pagan world, what they became was pagan

III. Conclusion

A.