

Write Seven Letters and Send Them to The Seven Churches

These letters are the last words Jesus spoke to the churches of Asia Minor. As we journey through these letters let's ask ourselves, "What would Jesus write to Believers Church in the city of Statesboro? What would He say about our love for God? How endure in trials? Our faithfulness?"

Last week we read the letter to the **Church of Smyrna**. A persecuted church that received no warning or rebuke from Jesus, **only encouragement**. They were being persecuted, they were being **crushed** because they would not declare Caesar is lord, but only confessed Jesus as LORD. **As a Follower of Christ Jesus, we can be our best even when life is at its worst.** Let's open another letter today.

The Letter Written to the Church of Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

120,000 to 200,000 strong, Pergamum was Asia's capital for almost 250 years and one of the greatest cities in Asia Minor. With buildings towering 1000 feet, it projected an image of majesty, strength, and the seat of authority, a "Royal City".

- Pergamum was not a port city; therefore, it was known more for its culture than commerce. The cultured people would have been considered trendy, "hip and cool".
- Pergamum was a center for learning, having the second largest library with some 200,000 volumes of books. It was also the first city to develop and use parchment as writing material.
 - The problem was all this learning didn't always result in wisdom, even in the church.
- Like Smyrna, it was a home of emperor worship and built a temple to a living emperor (Caesar Augustus). As the people pledged allegiance to Rome, they worshipped the emperors with titles as "lord and god" or "lord and savior". In turn, the emperors rewarded them with peace and stability.
- All Roman citizens were required to offer sacrifices to the emperor as a show of allegiance to Rome. Emperor worship was considered patriotic and when people began to follow Jesus, their patriotism was questioned, especially when they only confessed Jesus as LORD. This placed them in danger.

Revelation 2:12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword."

Pergamum understood the authority of Rome, brought about primarily by the wielding of swords. It's as if Jesus is saying, "I have a sword of authority too, and my sword is better than your sword! Remember this is a conquering, victorious Jesus speaking to them and **"and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword."** Revelation 1:16

Revelation 2:13a I know where you live—where Satan has his throne.

Jesus is saying, "I get it. I know where you live. I know you live in a dark evil place."

The expression "**where Satan has his throne**" may refer to the fortress and palace that stood on the peak of a hill in Pergamum, while the town itself occupied the lower plains. When you looked up at the palace and associated temples, it would seem to loom over you.

- One of the temples was The Temple of Trajan, built by the Roman Emperor for himself as he declared himself as god. Other Caesars followed suit beginning a whole cult of Caesar worship, marked by the praises of people saying, *Hail Caesar, Caesar is lord*.
- Another temple was **The Temple and Altar of Zeus, the god of war**.

Notice how this looks like a large throne with big arm rests on each side, looking down on the city. When a believer looked up at it, what they saw was a symbol of the "**Throne of Satan**". That's why Jesus said, "**I know where you live—where Satan has his throne.**" Revelation 2:13a

We can't let the dark place we live in, be it a city, region, country, or culture surrounding us, cause to compromise our beliefs in Christ Jesus. The evilness of the place we live in or work at is not an excuse.

Yet You Remain True to Jesus' Name

Revelation 2:13b 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.

Antipas was the first martyr in the city. He was asked to worship Caesar, which meant he had to throw some incense in Caesar's altar and say Caesar is lord, but he said no. He refused and he said, "Jesus is LORD, not Caesar." Therefore, they cooked Antipas in a big brass bull.

- In the bull, the victim would roast to death and you wouldn't hear screaming. You would hear this trumpet blast and see smoke coming out of the nostril of the bull.

You think it's hard to follow Jesus in our culture today, where we live? Really? It's nothing compared to Pergamum. For us it would be like trying to worship Jesus in an Isis stronghold.

This is what the believers in Pergamum experienced every day, YET they did not deny Jesus.

They remained true to Jesus' name. What about you and me? Do we remain true to Jesus?

The Warning

Revelation 2:14-15 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.

Most of the business life in Pergamum was connected to trade guilds that would meet together for meals held in the Hall of their pagan temples. Meat which had been sacrificed to the idols was served at the banquets. After the meal there would also be drinking and participating in sexually immoral acts.

The Teachings of Balaam - Balaam basically said you can live in two different worlds at the same time, with one foot in each. You can worship God and have sex with who ever you want and do whatever you want to do because it really doesn't matter.

The Nicolaitans – They were teaching the same thing, saying you can go to church and follow Jesus, but it's also ok to party, to drink, get drunk and participate in any kind of sexual immorality and it's ok. Both are ok. (Sounds a lot like our culture today.)

This line of thinking and teaching was creeping into the church as well, just like today.

The Nicolaitans were saying, "**People of God, it's time to COMPROMISE.**"

The church was compromising in two areas: 1) Sexual immorality and 2) compromising the truth.

The Holy People of God were beginning to accept this teaching and compromise the truths found in God's word, **the sharp double two-edged sword.**

From the days of Balaam (about 1400 B.C.; cp. Num. 22:1–24 and 25:1–3), to the Nicolaitans of John's days, right up to today... **God's people have been tempted to make accommodations to pagan culture and its destructive practices.** (1 Cor. 8:1–12; 10:14–33).

One Small Compromise at a Time

Pergamum is so much like the church of today. We compromise in the area of sexual immorality and we compromise the truths in God's Word.

We must understand that idols in our lives are built one small step, one small compromise at a time.

- Victoria Secret. / HBO, Netflix TVMA / Look at pornography online. One small step at a time. No one ever says, "Today I want to turn away from God!" It happens one compromise at a time.

Let me share a story with you about **Nate Larkin**, and how little compromises cost him everything.

ILL: I Am Second Nates Larkin Video. (Liquid Church 16:25 – 20:21)

To the idol of sexual immorality, on that altar Nate sacrificed his wife, family, and ministry. How did he get to that point? How do we get to those points in our lives? One compromise at a time. Did you hear what Nate said? He said, *“Every day I gave a piece of myself away. It left me hungrier and emptier every time.”* That’s what compromise does. That’s what sexual compromise does.

What’s Your Area of Compromise?

Yours may not be sexual compromise, but something else. What has its hooks in you?

What are you prone or tempted to do?

You might say, *“Sure I follow Jesus, but there’s some other things I allow in my life too. There’s some looking away or ignoring the truth. They seemed like little things at first, but they added up quick! The world said those things were acceptable, but I knew they weren’t, so I tried to justify my actions.”*

Bold Next Step: I will acknowledge my area of compromise in my life, knowing I cannot defeat what I don’t identify.

The Nicolaitans were saying, “If it feels good do it. You still love Jesus and Jesus still love you, so do what you want to do. Jesus wants you to be happy, right?” The church of Pergamum was embracing this- everyone but one and his name was Jesus. He said... **Repent therefore!**

You may be where you are in your life because of one small compromise at a time, but today is the day to fully, whole heartedly, repent, and turn away from your sins.

Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Revelation 2:16

Jesus is for you and the last thing you want is Jesus fighting against you. You will lose every time.

How will Jesus fight against them, or us? With the sword of his mouth. The truth in his words.

The Grace of God is Abundant, but the Truth of God is Important Too

To Jesus, the truth matters, the truth is relevant. He even said, “I AM the truth.” Therefore, the truth should matter to us, too.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- Pergamum compromised in the area of sexual immorality, but they also compromised the truths in God’s Word. This is our problem too.

EX: Maybe we fudge the truth, lie. We might lie about our income, our taxes, our resumes get little creative, or we make things look better or worse than they really are on our social post.

Maybe we tend to lie to make ourselves look good, etc.

Maybe we compromise the truth because we don’t want to rock the boat or be controversial.

The problem is sometimes we compromise the truth so many times we begin to believe our own hype or spin. We begin to believe our own lies.

Again, what did Jesus say to do? **Revelation 2:16 Repent therefore!**

Jesus said, “I died so that you can confess your sins, be forgiven, and repent. I rose to life, so that my resurrection power, enabling power can be in you to help you overcome temptation and live for me.”

ILL: That’s what Nate Larkin did. He repented and so can you.

That’s the power of repentance. I love what Nate said, *“Once I took off this churchy persona, I met Jesus. And I realized Jesus didn’t love this Churchie Nate, he just loved Nate, with all my flaws and sins.”* His wife said she would take the last 20 years just to have had these last 10 years with the new Nate. That’s the power of repentance.

Bold Next Step: After I acknowledge my area of compromise, I will repent.

The Promise to the Victorious

Revelation 2:17a 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.

- Manna was the food God's people lived on in the wilderness wanderings (Exod. 16:32–34).
- Jesus said he is the real manna for Christians to eat and live. **John 6:48-51 I am the bread of life... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."**

Revelation 2:17b (To the victorious) **I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.**

- The "white stone" means acceptance by God (compared to our idiom "black-balled").
- On the stone is a new name. God gave people new names with spiritual blessing and callings.
 - God changed Abram- exalted Father to Abraham – Father of nations, / Saria to Sarah / Jacob – the heel grabber to Israel - Prince of God.
 - Jesus changed the name of Cephas to Peter the rock / Saul to Paul.

The new name reminds me that Jesus doesn't make us better, He makes us new. A new person in Christ!

- Maybe the world had given you a name, based on their judgments of you.
- Maybe you've renamed yourself. Liar, cheat, sorry, worthless, whore, egomaniac, racist.

Jesus says no... the power of your past has been canceled. You've got a new name!
He changes our names to **Forgiven, Righteous, Child of God, Free.**
Now, see yourself like Jesus sees you.

I wonder what name Jesus has for you in heaven. Jesus doesn't see you from your past, but he sees you in your future.
God is calling you to live a life worthy of that name.

Bold Next Step: I will write my new name I would like to have in heaven on my white stone. I will live my life worthy of that name.

Water Baptism is very much like your new name. Both declare that you are a new person in Christ Jesus. Old things, all your past has been washed away. All things are new.

The difference? Your new name is a name that only you will know, but baptism is a public declaration for all to see.