

Series	Gamma 16 – Study 4
Topic	Pergamon and Thyatira
Reference	Revelations 2:12-28
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Good evening brothers and sisters in Christ. Welcome back to another evening where we are going to be studying the book of Revelations. This is Study 4. We will be looking at the second half of the second chapter of Revelations verses 12 to 28 and the two churches we will be focusing on today is Pergamon and Thyatira. So, before we start, let's commit our time to the Lord. Lord, we ask that you be with us this evening, help us to understand your word. Father we ask that your word will penetrate our sinful hearts, convict us that we may repent always and we may seek you and your glory. We ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

So, we're going to continue our look at the seven churches. We did Ephesus and Smyrna last week, and today we're looking at Pergamon. Pergamum is the church, which is challenged with compromised beliefs. It is a church located in a town of Pergamum. Like many other towns at that time dedicated to temple worship. They have a temple to the Emperor Trajan. There were a lot of imperial cults at that time where emperors were worshipped, and this was done in order to maintain unity. You had to come before the temple of the emperor to swear allegiance as part of your religion. And there were also trade guilds involved with these cultic practices as well.

Here's a temple, altar to Zeus. Here's one that has got a symbol of a snake, which is symbol of the god Asclepius. Now Asclepius is very important in Pergamum, one of the chief gods here, because if you were sick you didn't have hospitals in those days. You just go to the temple of Asclepius and if you're very sick they will put you down in the temple at night, you will lie down and at night snakes will come up all over the place. They will crawl over you. Hopefully they won't bite you. But after that particular cultic practice, you might be cured. A little bit different like this is the snake temple of Penang, something like that.

Here's a picture of the sacred passageways of this temple to Asclepius. If you were hungry and you needed food then you have to pray to the Empress Demeter. Look at Revelation chapter 2 verse 12

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword

So he describes Jesus in this description as having a two edge sword that's for a particular reason.

13 I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells

What is this idea of Satan's throne and where Satan dwells. Here is a picture of a Pergamum as it was in those days. This is basically a reconstruction of what it looked like and it is based on archeological pictures. We look at this next picture on the screen, it shows Pergamum. These are the actual ruins. This is the theatre that could actually take up to 10,000 people. It was a huge theater; they could watch their plays and their activities and here is the rest of it. It is located on top of a hill. All right. And Satan's throne is here. It is located right here. This is an alter to the chief God call Zeus. And in fact, this throne was discovered in 1871 and it was actually taken, if you go to Pergamum today, you won't see it. You have to go all the way to Germany, to Berlin, and you will see Satan's throne in Berlin. This

is a Satan's throne of Pergamum in Berlin, Germany. They took it block by block and brought it all the way to Germany. You could see that if you are ever in Germany, go and see the Pergamum museum.

Now, when we talk about Satan's throne, nowadays we've got some sectors of the Christian Church telling us we've got our spiritual warfare. We have got to pull down satanic strongholds, demolish demonic strongholds. If someone is having trouble, we should lay hands on him. We should cast the demon out. Now, if this is Satan's throne, does John do that. This is what John does.

I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness,

The issue here, how do you pull down satanic strongholds? You don't do it by casting out demons, you do it by holding fast to your faith, not denying your faith. Just like one of their witnesses. One of their witnesses was so faithful that he died. His name was Antipas. And legend has it that he was actually put inside an iron drum and roasted alive because he would not deny his Lord Jesus Christ. And that reminds you the Greek word for witness is 'Martus' and the original word meaning is Martus and later on, it became to include the meaning of someone who dies for the witness, but today the word Martyr has been watered down. It denotes somebody who is feeling sorry for oneself.

So the meaning of faithful witness in those days is faithful witness is willing to die for their particular witness. Now repent, spiritual warfare is repenting. It's not dancing in front of people, laying hands and then the spirit comes out. It's actually repenting understanding God's word where you've gone wrong so that we may live a godly life. Now, what is the criticism to the church, Pergamum.

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans

So, the false teachers are from two sources. One, like the teaching of Balam, the other like the Nicolaitans. Now, let me give you some background of Balam. Here you actually have a map of the kingdom of Israel. All right. And you can find, as the people were going into the Promised Land from this side, the Israelites in numbers had already defeated the Amorites and the next target was the kingdom of Moab and there were lots of them. And Balak, the King of Moab was very worried. He would not be able to defeat the Israelites in open combat. So what he did was he hired the prophet Balaam.

He hired Balaam to utter a curse on the people of Israel so that they will lose the war. They will be frightened. They will disappear. So three times Balaam tried. He paid money to Balaam so that he would alter a false prophecy again people of Israel, but each time he tried, he actually failed. In fact, one time as he was going Balaam's donkey was actually coopted by God to tell him, you know, to not to go forward and speak to him.

One that has failed Numbers 25. Let me read

1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods

So, three times Balak tried to get Balaam to utter a prophecy or curse upon the people of Israel. Three times he failed. What did he do? Well, Numbers 25 describes that somehow the Israelites live in

Shittim. The people begin to mix with the pretty women of Moab. And later on, they influence them, they sacrifice to their gods, they ate and bow down to their gods and their gods are Hadad, Chemosh, lots of them. And this is basically idolatry. This is betrayal of what God is and Numbers 25 describes in verse 9.

Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

So they could not defeat Israel by persuading Balaam to utter a prophecy against the people of Israel, because God protected the people of Israel. But when the people of Israel themselves, went and committed idolatry, God destroyed them. In Numbers 31, we find out why

This is when Israel finally attack, defeated Moab and Moses wanted the whole population destroyed, even the women.

15 Moses said to them, “Have you let all the women live? 16 Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD

So, three times King Balak tried to get Balaam to utter a prophecy that would curse the people of Israel and cause them to be defeated. He couldn't do it and the next time, you know what he did, he went to Balak what Balaam did was, I can't utter a prophecy against what God says but I can tell you this, you get your women to seduce the men, to act treacherously against the Lord and then the Lord himself will actually punish them and the plague came on and actually destroyed the people of God.

So, the link is always there though. The Moabite women will always lead you to the Moabite gods and this problem remains even to this day when we have intermarriages between Christian and non-Christian. The most important relationship in your life is actually your spouse and that will lead you to betray God. And God's actions are always predictable. When you sin against God, when you have idolatry, God will always institute punishment. Same thing with Nicolaitans. Nicolaitans also encourage idolatry and sexual immorality in the temples. So we have got food offered to temples, temple prostitution. This is what the people of Israel went into compromise. Jude 1:4 warns us

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ

It's sensuality, sex and power is what tempts us away. There was an Indian who was talking to some Christians and saying, you know, to his fellow Hindu people and saying, look when you have a whole bunch of Christians, don't persecute them. Because if you persecute them they will spread, they will even grow larger and wider and more pervasive influence. So what you do is when you have a large congregation of Christians, you build gambling houses, drinking houses, pubs and soon they will destroy themselves.

Richard Reader Harris was a clergyman and actually one day lined up his church and asked them, “All who are interested, I want you to put your hands up all those who like God to give you power and then the other hand, all those of you who want God to give you purity”. And sure enough 9 out of 10 put their hands up for what power, only 1 out of 10 put their hands up for purity. And people fail to understand that power feeds into this idea of sensuality. In order to get power, you actually need purity. You need to live obedient godly lives in line with God. You know, our time in the world is not very much different from a submarine you see in this picture. If you imagine water is the world, the

influence of the world and the Christian is submarine. We go to the deepest part of the world, but the moment any water floods into the submarine, it destroys it from inside. The influence is absolutely insidious.

So how do we deal with culture? How do we deal with the world? Well, on one hand we can be like monks. We can run away, live out in the mountain. We don't interact with the world, but we won't be any good in actually effecting change in this world, or we could join the world and be like them. And then there wouldn't be any difference and power will be lost. And what we have to do is to adapt to the culture, look at our theology and see how our biblical values fit into this world in order to influence them.

Why do we compromise? Well, we compromise for four reasons:

- Out of our own selfish desires. We compromise because we want to feed the things that we enjoy.
- We compromise because some of us are ignorant of God's word.
- We compromise because with fear of being labeled as a goody two shoes, as someone who is irrelevant and we all want to join and be part of a particular group, even among our friends and workmates. So we fear being labeled.
- Also, we are misguided in our attempt to be relevant.

I was remembering in my young days as a student, working part-time job in summer. I was in Sydney and I happened to work in a steel factory. In the steel factory, you find that every other word is a swear word. And after a while, I was really tempted to speak just like them in order to be relevant, otherwise they would not even look at me. They would have been talked to me. They thought I was particularly strange. So I have to use four-letter swear words. These are some of the reasons in our misguided attempt to be relevant, but 1-Peter chapter 3 verse 13 says

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.

We were formerly ignorant. We were formerly unrepentant sinners. But the act of working gets compromised is preparing our minds, being sober-minded, setting our hope fully on the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we need to be careful of the mechanisms of which we compromise. Sometimes we underestimate evil or we rationalize it, in the way we say, you know, we relabel it. This is Laurence Gould, who is professor of geology at Carlton College and he writes it's the subtle influences that actually destroys a particular organization. He writes, it is the subtle influences that actually destroys a particular organization. He writes,

"I do not believe the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or guided missiles. I don't think our civilization will end that way. I think it will die when we no longer care. Arnold Toynbee has pointed out that 19 of 21 civilizations have died from within and not by conquest from without. There were no bands playing and flags waving when these civilizations decayed. It happened slowly, in the quiet and in the dark when no one was aware."

And the compromise the creeps into the church is silent. It is quiet, it happens in the dark and before you know it we as a church would have compromised. It's like attending a traditional funeral and everybody's lifting up jo sticks. Right? So in order to join and be relevant and not miscast as an outcast, we take up the jo stick too. It is being respectful.

Suppose you are an employer providing employment for foreign workers and they work seven days a

week. They have no off day. They are very poorly paid, very poorly treated. And then we actually rationalize and say, well, I'm providing employment. If they were actually in Nepal, they would not have this level of comfort. They will not have this level of pay. So it's okay for me to abuse them.

This is a story of Rudy Kuniawan, who is basically a Indonesian immigrant to the United States and he had went into the business. You know what he was doing. He actually got wines. He was an excellent sommelier. He understood what wines and what tastes they were and all he did was basically take wines that were cheap and put labels of the more expensive wines on them and he made a huge profit. It is basically changing the labels. And when you rationalize something, what you do is basically you change the label in the sin, so it feels better to do it.

Joseph was sold instead of slaughtered and so therefore isn't that a lesser sin. So that's what the brothers did, they rationalized. So killing him is bad, selling him a slave is okay. We just changed the labels. On the other hand, we could be having legalism disguised as faithfulness. Here you have former prime minister Najib Razak actually in a swearing at the mosque. That he was actually not guilty, never did it, never stole a single dime of people's money and in the end he was recently found guilty.

So legalism, just because you swore in the mosque or the church so therefore you are correct, is disguised as faithfulness.

If you go back to the United States, they actually have what we call blue laws to enforce the Sabbath Day. In the Colony of Virginia in 1610 they actually have laws passed that you have to attend church service in the morning and in the evening. And if you didn't do so, the first offense you would lose your food allowance for a week. The second offense, you will lose your food allowance for a week and also get a whipping. On the third offense, they would come and you would lose your life. Very serious, but it's legalistic and this is trying to prevent Christian from compromising, but the wrong way.

In fact, we had a very famous story of Captain Kimble who actually came back after three years out on sea and when he saw his wife he quickly grabbed his wife and kissed her and he was put in the Stocks for two hours, because this was lieu an unseemly behavior on a Sabbath Day. So legalism can masquerade as bulwark against compromise.

Now the remedy.

Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

This is judgment. God will judge them. And what happens is that if you remember the story of Balaam as he was going, his donkey refused to go anymore. You know why? Because the donkey could see there was an angel standing there at the end of the corridor with a sword raised up to kill Balaam if he had come any closer to curse God's people. 24,000 people died in the plague. When the people of God went into idolatry because of Moabite women.

The challenge

17 He who has an ear, let him hear

We have discussed this before in our previous lessons. For a Christian, it is a challenge to gain your attention to gain obedience. If you're a Christian that's backsliding, well it is a shock you back into repentance. And if you're non-Christian, it will actually harden your hearts because those who lack spiritual wisdom will be prevented from seeing even more of this significance.

Now the reward. Now what happens to those who conquer?

I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

Hidden manna. Well, manna. If you look at Numbers 25, the people of Israel were tempted to whore and they ate and they celebrated the gods. So whenever you worship these gods, there's always food involved, so they ate. In Revelation 19:9

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Which means one day at the end of time there will be a marriage supper. Here if you look back,

To those who conquer, I will give some of you the hidden manna,

Which means there is manna which is food, not seen now. The food that you see now is the food that you eat with idolaters. Right. You can have that, but you're not going to have the food later on. The manna is hidden now but it will be revealed at the last supper. So John is saying that when the last day comes, when you actually have the marriage feast of the lamb, you will have that manna. If you eat now and satisfy your sensual desires now, you will not participate in the banquet in heaven in future.

You will receive a white stone. Now white stone is typically a stone given to those who have been tried and acquitted in court. It is a stone given to a victorious athlete when he wrestles or fights or symbol of freedom of a slave or even a ticket to enter into a banquet. It is a beautiful big stone that actually represents your righteousness.

You will be given a new name written on the stone. Now Revelations 22 talks about,

They shall see his face and his name shall be on their forehead.

And this name on your forehead represents the eternal presence of God. That means to know someone's name, there has to be an intimate relationship with that person and to share in that person's character because you are given the person's name and power. So to be given a new name was indication of a new status. No longer are we to be sinners, condemned to die but we have God's name on our forehead means we have his identity. We have his power. We have his protection. We have his life pulsing within our lives. And this is Isaiah 62 verse 2, which talks about the future.

The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.

So therefore Israel will have this new name and we are the New Israel.

So the second church which we will be looking at tonight would be the church of Thyatira where false prophets have been involved. Here is a picture of Thyatira,

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Now, we are talking about the words of the son of God. Why does he suddenly talk instead of son of man he refers to son of God? Because the people in Thyatira had a very famous temple there. It was a temple to Apollo, the son of Zeus who was the god of music, poetry, art, archery, medicine, sun, light and knowledge. So, they had this big temple there. They worship him. So therefore when Jesus addresses this people, he describes himself as the Son of God, because they are worshipping the sons of Zeus.

There is also a big temple to Artemis, which basically the god of hunting and also childbirth.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

Here is a church that is not a bad church. They were commended because they loved each other. They're not a church that lost their first love. They actually love each other. I know your works and then your latter work which is your later works are even better than your first works. All right. So they were actually commended and this was a loving, faithful and enduring church, but what does he have against them? There's a warning.

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead.

Here is a warning of a toleration of the woman Jezebel. Now woman Jezebel is basically a symbol and what John is using is a symbol of their history and bringing that forward into Revelation. So they have some understanding of what's happening.

They have a false prophetess, a woman, and this woman is symbolized by Jezebel. Now just give you history of Jezebel. Well, the Phoenicians were a formidable nation to the North of the people of Israel. They had lots of pots. They have timber, wool, purple dye, wine, poultry, olive oil, very rich. And what happened was the King of Phoenicia's daughter was Jezebel and so therefore King Ahab had a marriage arrangement with Jezebel, but the trouble is the people of Phoenicia had many-many gods. The chief god of which is Baal, the chief god of fertility and also of Asherah. And the King of Phoenicia was actually a priestess, a high priest, and the daughter was also a priestess.

So when she comes into Israel, she would definitely influence King Ahab to worship her gods, especially Baal, and all these involve sexual activity, fertility cult. She actually murdered, what started off as a minor toleration of this particular cult within the framework of Israelite religion, gradually because of her influence became the predominant religion and she actually murdered Yahweh's prophets. Her priests had a climactic battle with Elijah on Mount Carmel where Elijah won and she threatened Elijah and Elijah had to run away, and she actually murdered Naboth in order to swindle his lands from him.

Now what is prominent at that time was trade guilds. This is a city which had trade guilds were like unions. In a union for wool workers, linen, leather, bronze, pottery, tanners, bakers, slavers, dyers, leather workers, potters, all these people, every profession had a trade guild just like our colleges today. In fact, one of the most famous activity there was the color purple, which was actually sold by Lydia in the New Testament. And for you to participate in this trade guilds, meant you could sell your wears. You could interact, you could have contracts, but for you to participate in this trade guilds you have to participate in the religious rituals which were involved in these trade guilds.

So when you join this guild, the guilds are all located in the temples. You have to go there and participate in the sexual rituals, which is part and parcel of their religion. So food offered to idols, sex, all this is held in the temples under the trade guilds. Now if you do not join, after a while they find out you're not there anymore, it means you're not part of the guild and so therefore you will have no work. So, the question is, is it Jesus or is it your career?

I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality

Teaching of this false prophet is say to the people of Thyatira, it is okay for you to go to the trade guilds because it is your career. If you don't go, you don't participate in sexual rituals or eat food offered to idols, you will not be able to continue your business. You will be out of the job. You will be starving at a side of the street. So therefore, please go ahead. That was her influence. So this is much more serious than what is happening in Pergamum and she is described as Jezebel to jolt the people of Israel to understand that this is a serious challenge.

She taught the deep things of Satan. The deep things of Satan is to basically tell you that the physical world doesn't matter, is the spiritual realm that counts. So go ahead, participate in idol worship and feast. Do whatever you want sexually. Those are material things. God doesn't care about that. Look, if you're truly spiritual than your relationship with God would be so strong, enough to withstand the deep things of Satan. So go ahead, participate in evil parties, you can handle it. You will probably even learn more about the enemy in this process. These are the deep things of Satan.

Now you look at the two churches; Ephesus and Thyatira. They are complete opposite. Ephesus church was full of truths but no love, lost their first love, but that they resisted false apostles. The Thyatiran church was commended for their love, a lot of love. They loved and cared for everybody else. Great fellowship meals, but no truth, because they tolerated false prophets.

Francis Shaeffer, a great Christian philosopher wrote

Truth always carries confrontation. Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation nevertheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something wrong

We need to understand this affects the church even today where there is so much falsehood being put across to us.

Now, if you notice in the history of New Testament, God never condemns or writes about how big your churches, order of church service, how the offering is collected, color of the walls, songs, choirs, musician, design to the pulpit or charisma of the pastor or whether he is a good speaker or not. But God always points out false teaching. It is false teaching that if you tolerate will destroy the church from within.

The judgment

I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead.

This is judgment that is threatened and unless, He gives them time to repent but unless they repent they will undergo this great suffering.

I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works

And that is why when you got the description of Jesus Christ to the church of Thyatira is

'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire,

Which means God will see it through all the falsehood

and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Which was basically a moral foundation. So the son of God has eyes that will see through and cut through all the falsehood and see through and false teaching will be cast aside and whose feet are like burnished bronze, which means he stands on a solid molten moral foundation. Now, if you overcome

who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

So therefore, there will be victory. There will be authority and this verse is actually taken from the Messianic psalm which describes Jesus.

Psalm 2: 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son ;today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

This is a Psalm that describes the power of the Messiah when he comes. And so therefore, if you overcome, if you keep God's word, we will share in God's rule over all the nations as is described, iron rod, and when earthen pots are broken into pieces.

And lastly, not only that,

I will give him the morning star.

What is the morning star? Well, if you look in the past, the Roman emperors considered themselves to be descendants from the morning star, Venus. All right. So therefore, we are saying in Numbers 25,

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel: it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

Here is a prophecy that Christ the Messiah is the true Morningstar who will come forward. So today the Morningstar is a symbol associated with the messianic reign. The reign of the Messiah when he comes. And so therefore we are also promised the morning star, ruling with Christ when he comes. So therefore the challenge is for us today. If you look in both the churches; Pergamon and Thyatira, that we are not to compromise sexually morality. We are not to compromise with the culture and the ways of the world. We are to remain true. We're not to compromise with false teaching. We have to remain true and receive all the blessings and all the authority of our Lord Jesus in the end.

May God bless you and have a great discussion right after this. Thank you.