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Seven Churches, Seven Lenses Part 3

The Church in Pergamos

Text: Revelation 2:12-17

Song: HAVE THINE OWN WAY, LORD

Let us note the self-description of the Christ. To Ephesus, He is the One who holds the seven stars in His hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (2:1). To Smyrna, He is the First and the Last and the One who was dead and is now alive (2:8). Now, the Christ describes Himself as the One who has the sharp sword with two edges. One cannot help but connect this description to Revelation 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12 which says,

*For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

This letter to this church in Pergamos is from the One who is the word of God personified, the two-edged sword.

As we have seen in the previous two letters, Jesus knows these people. He knows all about them. Christ knows their work, their patience, their tribulations, their perceptions of themselves. He even knows where they live. To Pergamos Christ says, “You live where Satan’s throne is” (v. 13, two times). This is possibly a reference to a large altar to Zeus that was erected about 850 feet above the city. This city of Pergamos was the capital of the province of Asia.

Commendation: You hold fast to My name and did not deny the faith. This holding fast was done in a setting in which people were being killed because of their acceptance of the gospel. Denying Christ was certainly an option than some exercised. However, the church in Pergamos held fast. You remember Peter, don’t you? He denied knowing Jesus, probably because Peter feared martyrdom (Luke 22:54-62). Others went to death, gladly, because of their faith. Stephen, a man full of faith and power, died in 34 A.D. because of his embracing of the gospel (Acts 6:8; 7:54-60).

James, the brother of Jesus was martyred in 62 or 69 A.D. From Wikipedia:

Historian/chronicler [Hegesippus](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegesippus_%28chronicler%29) cites that "the Scribes and Pharisees placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and threw down the just man, and they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall. And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head”.

The people of Pergamos are commended for holding fast to their faith in a setting in which it would be easy, and tempting, to deny the Christ. These people of Pergamos are living where Satan’s throne is (v. 13).

After the *commendation*, however, comes Christ’s *condemnation*.

The language is interesting. Christ does not say that these folks *followed* the heretical doctrines of Balaam or the heresy of the Nicolaitans. Balaam was a seer from Babylonia who led Israelites into idolatry (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16). Christ does not say that these believers got swept up in those movements. Maybe Pergamos had simply been tolerant to a fault. They, says the text, *had them there* (14a, 15a). TEV: *there are some among you* or *some people in your group.*

Tolerance, while a great virtue, has its down side. We are living in a culture which boasts tolerance. The national debate about immigration is a debate about tolerance. Even right here at Crossroads we have several traditions coming together and some say we *tolerate* diversity. No, we *celebrate* diversity!

The downside of tolerance is that you may start accepting as normative that which is repugnant. We might, in the name of tolerance or multiculturalism, start *delighting* in the *distasteful*.

This is Pergamos, in our text. They were at the point where even if they didn’t agree with the heresy, they had the heretics around, they *had* them there.

**Closing**

Verse 17 is the promise to the saints of Pergamos - and to the saints in Stone Mountain.

 A white stone, symbolizing purity, and on that stone a name (a new name?) There is some discussion among New Testament scholars regarding the “new name” in verse 12. Does that name belong to Christ or the overcomer? The text is not clear. I suggest that the new name belongs to the overcomer. The Christ does not *have* or *need* a new name.

This book of the Revelation speaks, more than once, of that which is new.

* New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2)
* New heaven and earth (21:1)
* New songs (5:9; 14:3)

And in this text? A new name.

In my teen years I was introduced to a church in Harlem that sang a completely different song list than we had at Trinity Baptist Church in the Bronx. At Bethel Gospel Assembly, I heard, for the first time, C. Austin Miles’ hymn, *A New Name in Glory.*

***1. I was once a sinner, but I came***

***Pardon to receive from my Lord:***

***This was freely given, and I found***

***That He always kept His word.***

***Refrain***

***There’s a new name written down in glory,***

***And it’s mine, O yes, it’s mine!***

***And the white robed angels sing the story,***

***“A sinner has come home.”***

***For there’s a new name written down in glory,***

***And it’s mine, O yes, it’s mine!***

***With my sins forgiven I am bound for Heaven,***

***Never more to roam.***

***2. I was humbly kneeling at the cross,***

***Fearing naught but God’s angry frown;***

***When the heavens opened, and I saw***

***That my name was written down.***

***Refrain***

***3. In the Book ’tis written, “Saved by Grace,”***

***O the joy that came to my soul!***

***Now I am forgiven, and I know***

***By the blood I am made whole.***

***Refrain***

That was the promise to this Church in Pergamos: a new name.

Application and appeal

I want us to look at this Church at Pergamos through the lens of cultural tension and challenge. Just as these first century believers had to hold fast to both Christ’s name and their faith, in a place described as “where Satan’s throne is”, you and I serve the kingdom of God and Christ’s church in a culture that seems satanic at times. We have a government that seems, at times, to work not in the best interest of the poor, or the immigrant or the elderly or the very young. At times, our culture seems run by Satan. In Atlanta, there were 79 homicides in 2017 — good for a rate of 16.7 per 100,000 residents. That's 31 fewer killings than in 2016.

While Chicago had the most killings in 2017 with 650, Baltimore — which had 343 killings — tallied the highest rate per capita with about 56 homicides per 100,000 people. ([patch.com](http://patch.com))

 Sometimes, in the fight of good versus evil, it feels like evil is winning. Yet, we are called to the culture, to the society, to our city- to change it, to infuse it with the clear message of the gospel. We who have been given a new name, take that new identity into the world. In a series of holy conversations, we proclaim Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world: Immanuel: God with us (Matthew 1:23)

If you're here today and you're still living with the old- old name, old master, old way of going at life- I offer to you the One who was dead and who is now alive. I offer to you the One who has the double-edged sword of authority coming from His mouth. I offer you Jesus the Christ, who came that you might be made clean and be given a new identity. Will you say “yes” to Him?

Amen