

## Lesson 85

### Letter to the Church in Pergamos ⇒ Revelation 2:12~17

#### *(The Compromising Church)*

- The Church of Pergamon represents the Church of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, from 313 to 606 A.D. The word '*Pergamon*' has two meanings: '*tower*' and '*marriage*.' Some historians refer to it as the '*Lourdes of Antiquity*' because of the pilgrimages made to the city.
- Pergamon was home to several centers of pagan worship:
  - The only temple outside of Rome where the regular worship of emperors was permitted.
  - The Great Temple of Zeus, also known as the Soter, meaning '*Savior*.'
  - A large tower also dedicated to Zeus.
- The god '*Aesculapius*', the god of medicine and healing who was symbolized by a snake, was also worshiped in Pergamon. The myth of Aesculapius originated in Greece with a snake. The worship of Aesculapius in Pergamon was so strong that it led to the establishment of hospitals. People traveled there to be healed. According to the ritual, a snake would appear to those who were to be healed at night. If the snake did not appear, the person would not be healed. The snake came to be worshiped as a symbol of medicine and endures to this day, represented by a snake coiled around a Chalice (*Bowl of Hygiea*).
- After Babylon fell, the Medo-Persians introduced different forms of worship and began persecuting Babylon's official religion. Babylonian religion centered on the worship of a mother holding her child in her lap. Babylonian priests fled and settled in Pergamon. Other widely worshiped gods in Pergamon were Apollo and Athena.
- Paganism had taken such a firm hold in Pergamum that the Church of Jesus Christ was led into '*spiritual adultery*' by marrying the world. It was as if Satan had set up his throne in the midst of the true Church. As it is written in **V.13**, '***I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.***'
- To recap, the first-century Church was centered on Jesus, with leaders under His authority. It was a strict Church that had already lost its first love. In the second and third centuries, it was as if God sent fire from heaven to rekindle that first love. Despite all the persecution, the people remained steadfast. The Church remained steadfast in Jesus, and Satan was unable to destroy it. Now, in Pergamum during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, we see Satan changing his tactics by infiltrating and corrupting the Church – that is, '*the union of paganism and Christianity*'. Consulting a reputable encyclopedia will verify this union.
- Pergamum, with all its idolatry, represents the period when paganism infiltrated Christianity. Despite the persecution witnessed in the third century (*the Church in Smyrna*), the true Church continued to grow. So, Satan changed his strategy. If he could not defeat the enemy, he would join him. This resulted in a syncretism between paganism and Christianity.

- At the beginning of the fourth century, the persecution of Christians ceased, and Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine was impressed by Christianity's growth and the fact that nothing could stop it. By establishing Christianity as the Empire's official religion, the Emperor 'adopted Rome's policy of retaining everything useful from conquered peoples'. Rome's policy for strengthening the Empire consisted of retaining everything useful from the conquered peoples. 'Their culture, customs, etc.' Rather than prohibiting these things, Rome incorporated them into the Roman Empire as a means of strengthening it.
- That is what Constantine did with Christianity. Seeing the potential, strength, and resilience of Christians, he adopted it to strengthen the Empire. Many say that Constantine was saved, but only God knows for sure. However, history shows that the Christianization of the Empire was a political move to win a civil war. Consider this: For two centuries, Christians were severely persecuted, and then suddenly, the ruler decreed that Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. Would one more or one less god have made a difference to the Romans?
- Many people adopted the new religion to please the Emperor. Entire regiments of soldiers were baptized without experiencing a true conversion. The blending of pagans and Christians gradually obscured the conscience of the true Church. Maintaining a clear distinction between the Church and the world became increasingly difficult, consequently making it harder to preserve the simplicity and purity of biblical doctrine. The clear Christian witness evident in the time of Smyrna gradually disappeared.
- Gradually, religious formalism replaced the true spirituality that had once shaken the world in the early days of the Church. Corruption took deeper root in the Church as it attempted to blend Christian theology with pagan philosophy. Over time, those who had not truly converted began to experience a '*lack of seeing and touching*,' and paganism returned under the guise of Christianity. Pagan festivals and deities adopted Christian names, and biblical doctrines gradually disappeared. A set of human traditions based on paganism arose in their place. Leaders were indoctrinated in these traditions and passed them on to the people. Everything, with no biblical basis whatsoever, was called Christianity.
- The phrase 'Catholic and Apostolic' is part of the original proclamation of the apostles. 'Catholic' means 'Universal,' and 'Apostolic' means '*according to the apostles' teaching*.' The true Church of Jesus is Catholic and Apostolic. However, the word '*Roman*' was added to the title '*Catholic and Apostolic*'. The Bible does not say that the Church of Jesus is Roman.
- The title '*Pontifex Maximus*,' meaning '*high priest*,' was given to the Emperor because he was the supreme authority of the Roman pagan religion. The Emperor wore the imperial crown and the tiara of the '*Pontifex Maximus*.' In 606, Boniface III proclaimed himself the Universal Bishop. Although the religion had been established since the early 300s, it was not officially recognized until the transfer of the '*Pontifex Maximus*' tiara from the Emperor to Boniface III. Boniface III came to be known as the 'pope.'

- Teaching was then made official, and we will see decrees issued by men at councils that gradually took the place of the Bible. One such decree established that papal and council decisions would henceforth have *'the same authority as the Word of God.'* Another decree deemed the supreme leader infallible in his decisions.
- It is difficult for many of us to face the truth. We must ask for God's grace, take this seriously, and take a definitive stand. Below, we present a list of decrees issued by councils that became official Church dogmas. The result was replacing the simplicity of biblical revelation with complicated, *'mysterious'* human creeds and worshipping creatures instead of the Creator.

⇒ **Romans 1:18~25**

- **Biblical doctrine deviations that have crept into the Church:**

Year

310	Praying for the dead has no biblical basis.
320	Using candles is a pagan custom. The N.T. does not recommend using candles.
375	Veneration of saints and angels.
394	The institution of the Mass.
431	The veneration of the Virgin Mary begins, despite not having existed until then.
500	Wearing priestly vestments
526	Last Rites.
593	The introduction of the doctrine of Purgatory, which did not exist until then.
600	Masses were celebrated in Latin, and the prayers to Mary.
606	Boniface III declared himself the sole <i>'Universal Bishop,'</i> the Pope.
709	The requirement to kiss the feet of the <i>'Universal Bishop.'</i>
754	The doctrine of the Church's temporal power.
786	Worship of images and relics.
850	The use of holy water.
890	Devotion to Saint Joseph.
993	The canonization of saints.
998	Fasting on Fridays and during Lent. Pagan festivals adopted by the Church and given a Christian faith.
1003	The establishment of All Souls' Day.
1074	Priestly Celibacy: Boniface VII instituted it on the grounds that descendants and heirs would not divert the Church's possessions. This justification is still used to this day!
1076	The dogma of the Church's infallibility was established.
1090	The rosary, which originated in the East, appeared.
1184	The Holy Inquisition was established.
1190	The sale of indulgences began.
1200	Communion bread was replaced by the host.
1215	The practice of confession was established.

1215	The doctrine of transubstantiation was established. Innocent III decreed that the host is transformed into the body of Christ and the wine into his blood.
1220	Adoration of the Host was established.
1229	The Bible was prohibited from being read by laypeople. The Bible was taken away from the people so that they would not find a basis for what was happening. This period is known as the Dark Ages.
1245	Use of Bells During Masses:
1316	Introduction of the ' <i>Hail Mary</i> ' prayer.
1414	The wine was removed from the Eucharist, leaving only the host.
1439	The doctrine of purgatory was established.
1545	The doctrine that equates tradition with the Bible.
1546	Introduction to the Apocrypha books.
1600	Introduction to the Scapular.
1854	The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary:
1864	The condemnation of the separation of Church and state.
1870	The declaration of papal infallibility by Pius IX.
1950	The dogma of Mary's real and bodily presence in Heaven, or the Assumption.
1965	Mary is proclaimed the Mother of the Church.

- None of these doctrines has a biblical basis. The Church made the same mistake as Israel by worshiping idols and aligning itself with the world. To accommodate the growing number of churchgoers, pagan temples were repurposed. Gradually, the idols and festivals of paganism were reintroduced under Christian names to satisfy those accustomed to them. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (vol. 21, pp. 774~775, 1966 edition), the ancient Babylonian Semiramis, with Tammuz in her arms, came to be known as '*the Virgin with the infant Jesus.*'
- Paganism has officially infiltrated Christianity. The Bible has been hidden away, and human traditions containing elements rooted in paganism have completely supplanted the Word of God. This is why Jesus addresses the Church in Pergamum in **V.12** as follows: '***These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:***'
- Whenever Jesus introduces Himself to the churches in the seven letters, He reveals the remedy to be followed and the judgment to come (v. 16). To this church, He presents Himself as the Word of God. Only the Word of God can heal, for it separates the soul from the spirit, the false from the true. It was urgent that this church be reminded of this, for only the Word of God could be the remedy.
  - ⇒ **Hebrews 4:12~13;** '*For the word of God is living and powerful,*'
  - ⇒ **John 12:48;** The Word of God, too, is what will judge.
- **V.13:** '***I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.***' That's a very harsh statement! Satan is beginning to put into practice the desires of his heart: '*I will be like the Most High.*' God says, '*Beware of Satan, for he will seek to create imitations of the true One. He reigns in this city.*' The throne represents the source of command and the heart of the kingdom.

- ***'And you hold fast to My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.'***

However, there were people in Pergamum who kept the Lord's name. Bearing the Lord's name means not fearing the testimony, even when death approaches, as happened in Pergamum. The name '*Antipas*' means '*against all*.' Antipas stood up against everything, including idolatry. All of the Antipas who stood up at that time were killed.

- The true bride of Jesus has been so persecuted! Many people have remained silent, failing to bear witness to Jesus, because they prefer the glory of men and are afraid of rejection. This applies to us today. These letters to the Churches contain powerful warnings about the dangers we may face in our Christian lives. In order to be accepted, we do not bear witness to Jesus. Instead, we prefer the glory of men and the world. We need to stand up, take risks, and walk like true '*Antipas*.' Antipas remained faithful until death and maintained his witness.

- **V.14: '*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.***

Balaam, a false prophet hired by Balak, attempted to curse the Israelites. The Israelites had left Egypt and were passing through Moab. Fearing the Israelites, Balak called Balaam, a prophet and seer, to curse them. However, when Balaam went to prophesy curses against Israel, blessings came out of his mouth instead. Balak became angry, but Balaam told him not to worry because he knew how to harm the Israelites. (⇒ **Numbers 22~25**).

- Balaam knew the God of Israel, but not fully. He knew of Him only by hearsay. Like many people today, he judged God based on natural morality. Balaam knew of God's holiness and righteousness. So, he said to the king: Look, Balak. All you need to do is send some '*models*,' some '*top models*,' to Israel, and everything will be settled. I'll give you all the tips because this people has a just and holy God. If they stray, God Himself will destroy them, and you won't have to lift a finger. However, Balaam did not know God's grace, which took the place of sinners and was righteous in judging sin.
- Balak did this, and it worked. The Israelites turned to prostitution and idolatry. They began associating with Moabite women, who had been sent for that very purpose. The Israelites married the women, and plagues fell upon them. Moses asked, '*What is this?*' God replied, '*Disobedience*.' We need to understand what happened with Balak and Balaam because God said it was the same thing that happened in Pergamum.

⇒ **Numbers 25:1~3**

⇒ **Numbers 31:16**

Whose advice caused the women to stray? Balaam's, because he wanted a reward. According to God, that is what happened in Pergamum.

- **V.15: '*Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***  
In Ephesus, Nicolaitanism was referred to as '*deeds*' (V.6), but in Pergamum, it is described as '*teaching*.'

- **V.16; 'Repent therefore!'**

Consider the examples of Judas and Peter. Judas only felt remorse for what he did to Jesus, which led him to commit suicide. Peter, on the other hand, truly repented and went on to become a great apostle. After accepting Jesus, we must change; mere acceptance is not enough. We must be converted. This is only possible through genuine repentance.

- **'Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.'**

The sword mentioned in **V.12** is a remedy. However, now it has become judgment because it is the Word itself that will judge us.

⇒ **John 12:48**

A double-edged sword used as an instrument of judgment is terrible. As it is written, '*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*' (⇒ **Hebrews 10:31**)

- **V.17: 'To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna.'**

If Jesus is our '*manna*' from heaven, then no matter what troubles come our way, they will not shake us. Jesus is the bread that sustains us on our journey through this world, this desert. The hidden manna is the Lord Jesus himself – the bread that the world does not see. That is why he is hidden.

⇒ **John 6:30~35**

⇒ **John 6:48~51**

- **'I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.'**

In ancient voting systems, a white stone signified acceptance, while a black stone represented rejection. When Jesus says that we will receive a white stone with a new name written on it, he is saying, '*He is mine! The world rejects him, but I do not. He is mine; he is my chosen one.*'

- And on that white stone is written a new name. '*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*'

⇒ **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Only those who receive Jesus know the new name. We are speaking of something intimate and important to a person – a name is very significant.

⇒ **Revelation 2:12~17;**      Letter to the Church in Pergamum.