



# WEEK 3

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

## SHARE THE TRUTH

We continue our study of the seven churches in Revelation by looking at Pergamum. Pergamum was roughly 70 miles north of Smyrna. Located on a high granite hill, it rested higher than any other city or area around it for miles. It was metropolitan, committed to learning and research, and was known for its medical knowledge. Pergamum boasted more temples to the mythic gods than the other cities, including Zeus, Dionysius, Demeter, Athena, and Asclepius.

The temple to Asclepius, the god of healing, was particularly popular because it drew people from all of Asia Minor seeking help and healing. One healing ritual was placing the sick into a dark room and releasing snakes to crawl over their bodies as they slept. Snakes even became a symbol on their coins. The modern medical symbol of a snake wrapping its body around a staff is called the Rod of Asclepius. (also see Numbers 21:4-9).

With all of these pagan and imperial cult influences in Pergamum, it is not surprising that Jesus referred to this place as the "city where Satan has his throne" (Revelation 2:13). The struggle for the church in Pergamum would be sharing the gospel, the truth, about Jesus being the only true God and Savior for all in the midst of an overly populated area of worship for these mythic gods and emperors. The Christians knew the threat of death for sharing this truth because the bishop of the church in Pergamum, Antipas, was martyred in AD 92. The temptation for this church was to compromise their teaching of truth by allowing others to teach about false gods and worship the emperor. However, this is exactly what Jesus is calling the church in Pergamum to do- to share the truth, no matter the cost.



## WEEK 3 PERGAMUM

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM:

You are living in a city where the influence and the power of Satan are rampant, be on guard for that influence. Do not compromise the truth for the culture around you. Be people who speak the truth, live the truth, and share the truth.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*Truth is not simply what we say but what we live. Truth is not just the right answers but a right life. Christ is our comprehensive, personal truth to be expressed in gestures, actions, and conversations when no one is watching.*

# WEEK 3

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 2:12-17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Timothy 2:23-26*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think sound biblical teaching looks like? Pay attention to the first things that come to mind. Is it a certain style? A preference? Or is it the content of the message?

Why is sound biblical teaching so vital for the church? What is the best way to determine when teaching is false?

### SPEAK TRUTH

The overall message of this letter to the church in Pergamum is to focus on sound biblical teaching, rebuke false teaching, and to preach the true gospel. This is a powerful message for the church at this time in Pergamum and still is for us today. The church is meant to stand out from culture and society as a beacon of truth and righteousness, which isn't possible if truth and righteousness are compromised for comfort and relevance.

Teaching that is biblically sound should be the most important thing a believer looks for in assessing their commitment to the church body. Discerning biblical teaching has nothing to do with how charismatic, funny, or entertaining the pastor is, but instead with how dependent they are on the truth of God's Word. The best way for us to discern the true gospel from a false one is by being in scripture ourselves. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true.* We will not know if a church's teaching is sound if we haven't studied the scripture ourselves. When we submit to churches that teach truth above all else, we should be inspired to go out and be the church that speaks truth to the world.

# WEEK 3

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| Revelation 2:13, Proverbs 21:21, Hebrews 10:23

**REFLECTION:** List some ways that God has been faithful to you. List some qualities of what it looks like to be faithful to God. What are some steps you can take to grow in your faithfulness to God?

### STAY FAITHFUL

Eugene Peterson says, *"Truth is not simply what we say but what we live."* The church had gotten complacent in their faithfulness to Jesus. Faithfulness to becoming more like Jesus is the core of becoming the church that God can use to be a light to the world. When those outside the church see a faithful body of believers that love like Jesus, it is appealing to them. It feels like something they want to be a part of.

*A church is composed of persons who live in a particular town, eat food bought in the local markets, work at jobs provided by the economy, and speak a language in common with others in the region. But it is comprised of something quite apart from the conditions of piety, culture, and politics, namely, the person of Jesus Christ. God makes the church. The Holy Spirit breathes on the chaotic and random population, 'without form and void,' and makes a people of God, a church. Each of the seven churches, and every church since, is defined by the living Christ. A church only has being in relation to Christ. Apart from Christ, these churches would have location but no identity...There is no church apart from Christ...*

Written by Eugene H. Peterson - *Reversed Thunder*



# WEEK 3

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 2:14-15, John 14:6, Numbers 25:1-2 and 31:16*

**REFLECTION:** What are false teachings you have heard or witnessed in the church/culture that you are tempted to believe/follow?

What is appealing about that teaching? How is that teaching harmful to the gospel and living for Jesus?

### CORRUPTED GOSPEL

The king of Moab, Balak, was fearful of Israel's might, power, and their God. So he sent for the prophet Balaam, hoping Balaam would curse God's people. The Spirit of the Lord intervened and prevented Balaam from cursing Israel; instead he blessed them. When Balaam could not do what Balak wanted, Balaam developed a plan that would be Israel's downfall (Num. 25:1-2; 31:16)...

Understanding this passage lends context to our reading of Jesus' conviction of Pergamum. Evidently, there were some, not all but some, who were allowing paganism to corrupt the gospel. God's people were to remain pure, but their faith was being polluted by bad theology...we have professing believers (today) who like Jesus and affirm His teachings on love and acceptance, but they bristle at the idea that Jesus might be exclusive or divisive. We live in a culture where people want "Jesus +" or "Jesus -" rather than the Jesus of Scripture. Compromise is subtle and seductive. It usually begins with our own discomfort with some part of God's Word. We can't get Jesus without the Old Testament. We don't get Jesus without the law. They tolerated teachings that were not consistent with the whole counsel of God's Word and the ministry of Jesus.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 3

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 2:16, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Acts 3:19, Hebrews 4:12*

**REFLECTION:** Think about the decisions you've made this week. Did you consult anyone before you made those decisions? We are called to place our whole lives under the authority of the Lord. Who gets to tell you how to live?

In what area of your life do you need to turn back (repent) toward God? Spend intentional time in prayer asking for forgiveness and then reflect/write down how you can actively begin to seek repentance towards that thing in your daily life.

### WHO IS MY AUTHORITY

Jesus introduces himself in this letter as the one who has "the sharp double-edged sword". This image of Jesus as a sword is a powerful reminder to the people. The sword was significant to the church at Pergamum. The governor of Pergamum had been given the right to bear the sword by Caesar which means he was given the power over who lived and who died. Jesus established His authority as the one who is actually in charge, not Caesar, not the governor. We tend to forget who is in charge. Often we either want to be our own authority, or we look to false teachers to be our authority. Jesus reminds the church that they must repent from this arrogance and place their lives back under His authority. The second reason this image of Jesus as a sword is powerful is because it points back to Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is...sharper than any double-edged sword...it exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." Jesus is reminding the church, and us, that he sees the things going on in our hearts. When we try to be our own authority, it leaves us vulnerable to false teaching and temptation to do whatever feels right in our own eyes. This is what Jesus was warning against; it's a warning that we should heed as well. Who gets to tell you how to live? If you haven't placed every aspect of your life under His authority, Jesus says repent and turn back. There is great reward for the believer who submits their whole lives to the authority of Christ.

# WEEK 3

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| Revelation 2:17, John 6:41, Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Peter 2:4-13

**REFLECTION:** Take a moment and reflect on how you want to be seen by those you love. Now take a moment and think about how they would describe you.

The truth is that despite your flaws, brokenness, mistakes, and sinfulness, Jesus sees you through a lens of love. Read 1 Peter 2:4-13, finish this time by writing how Jesus sees you (based on His Word and not on your feelings).

### REWARD FOR THE STRUGGLE

This offer in Revelation 2:17 for those who hear what the spirit is saying and are victorious is significant. Jesus says he offers manna from heaven and a white stone with a new name written on it. These are symbols of provision, protection, and redemption. Despite our brokenness and sin, there is hope for those who repent and turn back to the Lord. We are credited righteousness by the blood of Jesus, which means we are His beloved children.

Eugene Peterson says this in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*The hidden manna is the food that God gives to his people, the nourishment that keeps them going. The stone with the new name written on it is the identification that Christ gives us as his people. He will sustain us, and he will identify us as his own. A most appropriate reward for being victorious in the struggle! The battle is not between good and evil but between truth and error. To fight it well means to throw one's life on the side of truth, to discern between what is right and what is spurious.*

# WEEK 3

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 2:12-17

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 3:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- How can you begin to teach the truth to those around you and fight the temptation to compromise this truth?

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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*