
GROWTH GROUP WINTER 2019 – DEAR CHURCH,
WEEK 4 – FEBRUARY 3, 2019 - REVELATION 2:12-17

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

- 1) Some people in your group might remember the “blue laws” or Sabbath laws” when certain activities were not allowed so that people could go to religious activities. Have a few people share what they remember.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Pergamum was known for a majestic set of temples which dominated the view of anyone walking through the city, as well as the surrounding countryside. These temples represented various deities and religions and idolatry was a constant threat. What’s left of the city of Pergamum (also called Pergamon) is situated on a hill overlooking the modern day city of Bergama, Turkey.

You can read more about Balaam in the Old Testament in Numbers 22-24. He appeared to be a true prophet who refused to utter a curse against Israel, but in Numbers 31:16, and in later Jewish and Christian writings, he was blamed for Israel’s idolatry and immorality as described in Numbers 25 and also 2 Peter 2:15-16 and Jude 11.

Like Balaam, the Nicolaitans appear to be urging believers to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. The church at Pergamum has lost its cutting edge and its ability to say ‘no’ to the surrounding culture. The congregation as a whole, is not implicated in the sins of the Nicolaitans yet, but Jesus does call the church to repentance.

Jesus makes it clear that though the Roman government may wield the sword, he has the sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. His word will cut through the half-hearted spirituality and compromise that defines some of the believers at Pergamum.

There are two promises given to the church at Pergamum. The first one relates back to the Old Testament. The early church was sometimes compared to the Israelites in the wilderness. There was a journey to be made and there were temptations all around. On that journey in the wilderness God had fed his people and cared for them. Psalm 78 also refers to a treasury of manna that was to descend from heaven during the messianic kingdom to feed the blessed. The “hidden manna” was the promise that would “feed and care” for the believers in Pergamum if they would stay true to the teachings of Jesus.



The white stone may be connected to architecture of Pergamum where the largest of buildings were constructed with a local black stone. When inscriptions were placed on buildings, white marble was used and then fixed on the black building so that it could be read and seen. There was also a tradition of guests at a feast being given a stone with their name on it as their way of being admitted to a party.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Revelation 2:12-17

¹² *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ 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. 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. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷ 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. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.*

- 2) Jesus twice refers to “the sword of his mouth”. Read Ephesians 6:13-17 where the apostle Paul talks about the armor of God. In verse 17 he talks about “the sword of the Spirit”, which he says is the word of God. The sword is the only offensive weapon mentioned in these verses and would have been understood to be a Roman short sword designed for hand-to-hand combat. In light of this, how should we understand what Jesus and the apostle Paul were talking about, when relating the sword of the Spirit to Scripture?
- 3) What do you think of the tone with which Jesus speaks to the congregation in verses 14-16? Are you comfortable with Jesus speaking like this? Is this righteous anger?
- 4) The church has always struggled with how to keep from conforming to the culture around it. Where do you see today’s church conforming to the ways of the culture? What can the church do about that?
- 5) Can you think of a time in your life when a church that you have belonged to, or the Church as a whole, has stood up to our culture?
- 6) How do you, personally, keep from being too influenced by the culture? What things have you done, that you have found to be effective? How do you gauge whether you are being influenced too much by our culture?
- 7) We talk about being saved by grace alone. The false teachings in Pergamum appear to be saying that you can practice certain sinful acts as long as you believe in Jesus. How is grace related to obedience? If we have been saved by grace is there a need for obedience? What sort of correction is Jesus calling for in Pergamum? Why?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 8) We tend to describe ourselves to others by what we do, but that may not be the best way to describe who we truly are. Where do you find your identity? Our text tells us we will be given a white stone with a new name, in other words a new identity. What are the implications of having a new identity in Christ?