

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Revelation 2:12-17
“Tough In All The Right Places”

March 6, 2016
(4th Sunday of Lent)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIC, REVELATION 2:12-17
"TOUGH IN THE RIGHT PLACES"

29B.C. Augustus Temple: Center Of Emperor Worship

900 Ft. Above Plain, Capital of Roman Asia (133BC), 100+ Years Emperor Worship

7/7			
Address	1) v.12a Introductory "Angelic" Formula.	150,000 Then, Modern Bergama	
		Great Acropolis, Huge Altar Of Zeus <i>the Savior</i> (Berlin),	
12	"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:	200,000 Volume Library. Temples Athena, Dionysus, Asclepius	
		Asclepius Shrine (Lourdes Of That Day); Also, <i>City Of The Sword</i>	
Epithet	2) v.12b Characterization of the Risen Lord from 1:16, 19:15.	PROBLEMS WITHOUT & WITHIN	
		1:16, 2:16, 19:15, 21, Long-sword (<i>rhomphaia</i>): pierce & cut, 11:4, 49:2	
	The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword .	Mouth! Messianic Warrior, <i>Ius gladis</i> (right of sword)	
		Image Of Christ As Judge, Above Roman Governor / Truth-Teller	
Praise	3) v.13 Praise Formula "I Know."/ Satan (4:2 Chiasm).	vv.13-16 Praise/Blame Mingled	
		Comfort In Hardship, (FAITHFUL WITHOUT): Cosmic, Counter-kingdom	
13	a I know <i>where</i> you dwell , where Satan's throne is;	20:2 Serpent (Asclepius Serpent), Who Rules? 13:2	
		Altar Of Zeus? Emperor Worship? Government? Asclepius (snake)? Acropolis?	
	b you hold fast my name and	Exclusive Loyalty, Major Site for Emperor Worship (29BC)	
		Echoes Jesus, 1:5, 3:14, <i>Imitation Christi</i>	
	b' you did not deny my faith-	Pressure To Deny Was Strong! Lk. 12:9, No General Persecution	
	even in the days of Antipas my witness (<i>martus</i>),	Leader? Revelation's Only Named Victim	
	"my faithful one,"	1:5, 3:14 Echoes Titles Of Jesus	
		who was killed among you, Only Martyr, Teenager (Later Church Tradition, Boiled In Oil)	
		Do Not Assimilate: Syncretism (<i>go with flow!</i>), Accommodate + Witness + Suffer	
	a' where Satan dwells .	Satan's Home Town! Most Likely Imperial Cult, Hard Place To Be The Church	
		(TROUBLE WITHIN: Heresy)	
Blame	4) vv.14-15 Chastisement: "But this I have against you."	More Extensive	
		Tolerate False Teachings	
14	But I have a few things (pl.) against you:	21:6, Idolatry and Immorality = Cultural Assimilation	
		Num. 22-24 (<i>Hired To Curse</i>), 25:1-18(<i>Immorality/Idolatry</i>), 31:16 (<i>Blame Balaam</i>), Jude 11, 2 Pt. 2:15	
	a you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam ,	Code, Soothsayer, False Teacher, Led Israel Astray	
		v. Syncretism/Blending, O.T. Precedent For Challenge	
	b who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel,	Hired By King Of Moab	
		Acts 15:20, 29; Jerusalem Decree, 1 Cor. 8-10, <i>Didache</i> 6:3	
	b'1 that they might eat foods sacrificed to idols	Markets, Live In Pagan Society More Smoothly	
	2 and practice immorality (<i>porneia</i> , fornication).	2:20 Thyatira, <i>Didache</i> 6:3, Pagan Idols/Sex	
		Is <i>immorality</i> Metaphorical Here? <i>Nika laon</i> = <i>Conquered/Consumed Peoples!</i>	
15	a' So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans .	Gk. For Balaamites?	
		2:6 (Ephesus Hates Nicolaitans), 2:20. Struggle Internally, 1 Cor. 8-10	
Coming	5) v.16 Call to Repentance and Warning of Judgment.		
		Responsibility Lies With The Whole Church: Why So Susceptible?	
16	Repent then.	Reverse: Turn Around, Take Action Now! Call For Discipline, Deal With Foes, Turn Around	
	If not, I will come to you soon	If Not Fight Error, Christ Will Fight Us With His Truth, 4 Ezra 13:37-38	
	and war against them with the sword of my mouth .	War = Word Of Judgment, Gk. <i>Balaamites</i> , 1:16, 2:12b	
		Necessary to Preserve the Church, Cultural Distance	
Hearing	6) v.17a Call to Hear What the Spirit Says.		
17	He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches .	Plural: Each Hears All 7	
	7) v.17b Promised Reward (3's).		
		A Better World Is In Store! Eschatological Meanings	
Victor	To him who conquers	Stay Faithful! Resist! Imperial Ticket: Banquet Imagery	
	a I will give some of the <i>hidden</i> manna ,	Ex. 16:4, Num. 11:6-9, Stored Till End Time, 2 Macc. 2:4-8. 2 Bar. 29:4-8	
	b and I will give him a white stone,	Black Stone (Pergamum), Invitation to Messianic Banquet, Vote Acquittal	
	b' with a new name written on the stone,	Jesus Name? Better Banquet! Is. 56:5, New Identity From Deity	
	a' which <i>no one knows</i> except him who receives it.	Personal	

HOW HAVE WE MADE AN UNHOLY PEACE WITH THE CULTURE AND THUS LOST OUR WITNESS?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE TOLERATE BAD DOCTRINE AND IMMORALITY?

TOUGH IN THE RIGHT PLACES

"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is."

The Lord is fully aware of the pressures of our location.

REVELATION 2 : 1 3 a

Back in October an outbreak of E-coli in their stores sent the stock of Chipotle Mexican Grill down six percent. Until then it's growth was solid, and the reason is that Chipotle offers a fun way to eat. You come up to a food bar, look at all the options, then design your own burrito. Their niche is fast, casual dining. But the Chipotle experience is not just about customized burritos; it's an analogy for the phenomenon of *designer religion*. Some folk, in their quest to make sense of life, saunter up to the great burrito bar and say something like this:

"I'll have some of that evangelicalism. I like their energy and cultural adaptability. I like the regal nature of Roman Catholicism, and it seems kind of ancient, and I also need a little dab of mystery in my life- but not too much, please, because I want to figure things out for myself. Give me a dash of Hinduism because I sure like that open-endedness; and if I'm a good person, I'll be reincarnated in a higher life form. I like the calmness and detachment of Buddhism. But once again, give me just a small portion because I don't want to quench all of my earthly desires. Wow, Islam has some seriousness and discipline. That would sure help me stay on track. I'll put a little bit of that in there. Oh, but that judgment of God stuff- that's too spicy. And that 'Jesus is the only way to God' salsa- none of that. I don't want to be limited to one option."¹

In August 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey to "explore the complexity of faith in the modern world and the overlap between religions and other supernatural beliefs." Sixty-five percent showed evidence of holding contradictory religious beliefs. In addition to believing the Bible,

¹ PreachingToday.com search under *syncretism*.

Revelation 2:12-17..... 4

they believed in reincarnation, astrology, séances, ghosts, psychics, the power of the evil eye, and yoga as a religion. One researcher concluded: "Mixing and matching practices and beliefs is much more the norm than the exception."² Cheryl Crow, the pop singer, spoke for many when she confessed:

"I believe in God. I believe in Jesus and Buddha and Mohammed and all those that were enlightened. I wouldn't say necessarily that I'm a strict Christian. I'm not sure I believe in heaven."³

The technical name for this pattern of belief is *syncretism*, which is the blending of incompatible faiths for practical outcomes, a little bit of this and a little bit of that for an customized spirituality with three persons at the center: *me, myself* and *I*. Phil-ism, Sue-ism, Fred-ism. If you think I'm making fun, I am a bit. And when I ask— ever so gently, about the contradictions, they stumble and then come back with a reference to the self, "But it makes sense to me. I like the way it feels."

I once encountered an unforgettable example of syncretism at a Dallas bookstore. I was looking for a new book in the Christianity section, which was right across the aisle from the occult section: tarot, astrology, witchcraft, spiritualism— all the spooky stuff. I was not in clergy garb but out of uniform. Up walked a woman behind me who began browsing the Tarot section, which is basically a version of *cartomancy*, which is fortune telling through cards. I decided to keep to my business, but then got one of those nudges I call *a holy hunch*. So I turned and asked, "I don't know much about Tarot; could you explain it? It was the right question, and she was quite an expert. When I asked a follow-up, "Do you go to church?" her answer surprised me, "Yes, I'm a member and go every week to High Rock Baptist,⁴ and I just love the preacher. He really preaches the Bible." "Aha," I thought to myself, "a syncretist. I bet there's a story here." And when I asked how and why she combined the two she smiled and answered simply, "I believe in Jesus for the really big stuff, like forgiveness and going to heaven, but for the daily stuff, like finding a man or paying the bills and daily guidance, I use Tarot cards to stay in touch with the good spirits." And when I asked the next, obvious question, "Do you not think Jesus cares

² "Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths," pewforum.org (12-9-09), www.pewforum.org/2009/12/09/many-americans-mix-multiple-faiths.

³ <http://dashhouse.com/sermons/2010/10/3/the-key-to-peace-colossians-115-20>.

⁴ Not the real name!

Revelation 2:12-17..... 5

about your daily life?” she looked puzzled, as if it didn’t compute. And when I asked if anyone had shared with her what the Bible has to say about the spiritual danger of occult practices as a doorway into real darkness and evil,⁵ she looked as if I’d just spoiled her party. The beings, the supposed bright angels that influence her through the cards had become her spiritual friends, and- from her reports- helped her out with information from to time, which I do not doubt. She lived, effectively, in a two-level universe in which Jesus took care of upstairs life-after-death issues, but spirits took care of ground level concerns, and she did not see the contradiction she was living. She did not understand that Jesus demands exclusive loyalty- that he is *Lord*, meaning *Boss*- and that the spirits she was consulting were the same ones he declared war on during his ministry and expelled everywhere he went.⁶

I was dealing here with a deceived Christian, with a syncretist, even a polytheist who was in effect dividing her hopes and loyalties between several supposed deities, each of which had a specialty- or so she assumed. She did not understand how dangerous her curiosities had become, and so the best I could do was share with her that Jesus was much bigger and better than she thought and that a talk with one of the pastors at High Rock might be a good idea. So far as I discerned, she was not a wicked woman, just naive and discouraged with unanswered prayers and looking for a way to make life work. She answered every question I asked with a simple honesty that was disarming. And as she told me a few of her troubles, she became a more and more sympathetic character. There are many like her, and more are joining the club of syncretism and polytheism every day, as the Pew survey indicates. Many of them admire Jesus- some from close up in the church, others from further away as drop outs or seekers- but they have a distorted picture of who he is and what he means for ground-level living.

The real alternative to the Bible’s one God of holy love is not modern atheism- because the evidence is against it;⁷ instead, the real alternative is ancient polytheism

⁵ See the appendix at the end of this sermon on occult practices. I invite you to read the scriptural passages under a heading before reviewing the attached questions.

⁶ On the historicity of Jesus as exorcist, see Craig Evans, “Jesus and Exorcism” in Darrell Bock, editor, *Who Is Jesus* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2012), 79-92,

⁷ For a simple, accessible introduction to Christian evidences, see Alex McFarland, *10 Answers To Atheists* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2012).

Revelation 2:12-17..... 6

all dressed up for a new day with celebrity sponsors.⁸ After all, the real alternative to the one God of the Bible is not no god but multiple gods and goddesses who each require of bit of loyalty and attention, and sometimes even sacrifices. A idea often attributed to G.K. Chesterton says that when men stop believing in God, they do not believe in no god but in all the gods.⁹ And once you go beyond one, there's really no logical place to stop; you just add one more and one more for the next need or experience. And that, I think, is the origin of polytheism in a fallen world where knowledge of the one, true, and living Creator God of Jewish and Christian faith has been obscured by the cognitive effects of sin and evil. God sees us clearly, but our sight and apprehension of God is fractured in pieces. We know there's something more, even *someone* more, but where to stop the naming?

There are many forces in the world— fire and light, darkness and death, seasons and stars, volcanoes and storms, the vastness of the night sky and the open oceans. There are also many forces within us— rage and desire and love and awe and curiosity, hungers of the belly and heart and mind, dreams and visions, a sense of sacred places and deep symbols, and nagging questions about the meaning of life: Why are we here? What does it mean? Is anyone up there or out there listening? And just as we humans are agents whose choices make things happen, there must be behind appearances another set of agents who make things happen, and since so many different things are found both outside and inside the human person, there must be many such beings since no one can do everything. Since we go to war, perhaps there's a deity who instigates such, the ultimate warrior, say *Mars* and his wise daughter *Athena*. And since every tribe needs a king, is there a *Zeus*? Maybe a goddess of the hunt— *Diana*, and a grower of wheat— *Demeter*, a goddess of love— *Aphrodite*, and a messenger between them all, *Hermes*. And since he ruled the world from Rome, could it be that *Augustus Caesar*— and after him *Tiberius*— was exalted to heaven to join the gods above and whom to honor at his temple is the glue that holds the Empire together? And what about the Temple of Asclepius in Pergamum where the sick go to sleep at night and perhaps receive a vision of the sacred serpent that sometimes leads to healing? Are these not benefits?

⁸ On the attraction of polytheism, see Rodney Stark, *Discovering God: The Origins Of The Great Religions And The Evolution of Belief* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2007), 96-97, 202-206. An interesting read is James J. O'Donnell, *Pagans: The End Of Traditional Religions and the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Ecco, 2015). For a critique, see McFarland, *10 Answers*, 92-96.

⁹ For a discussion of the quote, see www.chesterton.org/ceases-to-worship.

Revelation 2:12-17..... 7

Does this system of many multiple male and female deities not make a certain sense out of life and all its lush diversity? It did to many in the ancient world and in the world before there was written history but only myths and legends passed on in storytelling. It surprises many to learn that Mormonism, while it has one main deity, also makes room for other gods and teaches that each male may become a god through what they call *eternal progression*.¹⁰ The name for this brand of polytheism is *heno-theism*: one main god and an array of lessers. To repeat the first line of the Apostles' Creed goes against their teaching and is a clear dividing point between us.

In the ancient polytheist world view, the gods and the goddesses are much like us, just as peevish and unpredictable, just as lusty and fickle, only now much larger and much more powerful and dangerous. To keep them all happy requires divided loyalties and many sacrifices to cover all your bets, and also much superstition and rituals to be managed by the priests and the temple staffs reading the entrails of animals for guidance or observing the flights of birds for omens. Perhaps the only great sin in such a complex system— social and religious and political— is to claim that your God is not only the only one worthy of the name, but that all others are not only not divine but illusions energized by the Evil One and thus thoroughly deceptive. And that is why the early Christians were often slandered as *atheists*, because they did not affirm the many deities of polytheism and its cultural supports in myths and temples and sacrifices and government. It was an attack on the whole system.

The creed of the Jews was and is, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.... and you shall have no other gods before me since I save you from Pharaoh, and no images either since I the Lord am other and not to be confused with anything in creation. I am not a god you can make soap carving of and sit on your bathroom shelf as some sort of good luck charm. I have loved and chosen you, and I will hear your prayers, but I am beyond manipulation and magic. I made it all.”

For a long time it was the Jews and their one holy God Yahweh standing over against the whole of the ancient world with its many gods, some of them quite bloodthirsty for child sacrifice and others quite lewd in the habits. One of the greatest argument for God is that the Jews and their minority report survived!

And then, well into the Jewish tale, when Jesus showed up as a surprise, claiming to have come from the Father as an only Son with the Holy Spirit as his companion, and when he was raised from the dead in a way that certified the man and

¹⁰ See McFarland, *10 Answers*, “*Mormonism: Many God and Me Too*,” 115-116.

Revelation 2:12-17..... 8

his teaching as true, his first followers were forced by the evidences they agreed on into a new kind of modified Jewish monotheism: one God in three equal divine persons who draw their one life from their internal relations. The core Christian claim is that the one God of the Jews is now revealed as the One who had always known himself as a communion of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Not three gods and thus a nod back in the direction of the many gods of polytheism– as Islam still accuses us, but one God in three persons, a blessed Triune being. The one God of Israel is a special divine society, and holy love is God’s deepest nature. Only one true and living God, the Creator of all that is, visible and invisible, who finally, at just the right time, acts in such a way in Jesus as to offer new insight into the divine life. It is through God’s actions that we understand God’s person, and when the Son says he carries out his Father’s will not in his own power but in the energies of the Spirit, it means a new understanding of the one God’s relational complexity is on offer.

And so the Apostles’ Creed, a confession formulated by the church for new converts who came to faith from a culture rife with polytheism, begins with a bold counterclaim that there is only one God, a Father supreme but not a male human being like Zeus, with all power necessary to do what he wishes, and that this God alone is the source and creator of all that is. It was a bold slap in the face of everything the ancient world believed, with the exception of a few philosophers who laughed at the antics of the gods as human folly writ large against the heavens and moved in the direction either of a philosophical monotheism– a single prime mover– or of atheism– no personal God at all, only atoms.¹²

And it is against just this background of many supposed deities that the church confessed how it was different from the whole world, “I believe in God,” the convert recited on the day of her baptism, “the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,” to which the Nicene Creeds later adds a clarifying phrase, “and of all things, visible and invisible.” If it exists, visible or invisible, we know who made it, and made it good. And when you lay the church’s Jewish roots and emergent faith over against

¹¹ For this idea I am indebted to Timothy George, *Is The Father Of Jesus The God Of Muhammed?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), Chapter Four, “Why the Trinity Matters,” 69-88.

¹² On the philosophy of Epicurus as mediated through the poet Lucretius and eventually into Enlightenment deism and its distant, non-intervening deity, see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How The World Became Modern* (New York, NY: Norton, 2011).

Revelation 2:12-17..... 9

the background of the world in which Christianity was born, you see what a radical alternative it was, the constant pressure it was under from the surrounding culture, and why it was so costly to defend and why so easy to compromise. Thus Pergamum.

To follow Jesus as Lord in those days was not conventional wisdom; it was a new thing; it was to set yourself against the entire world, and it meant facing the ire and even hatred of the people many of you claimed as a spiritual mother, Judaism. Their book was your book, their psalms your song book of prayers. But then there was the problem of Jesus the Jew, who he was and what he did and how he died and what happened afterwards; he was the dividing point. If you come to believe from a pagan background, your peers now think you crazy because you no longer go with them to guild meetings at the temples and eat the meat sacrificed to the deity in whose honor you gather. And when they go out to drink and cavort, you no longer join them, and they ask, “What has happened to you?” And if you come to Jesus from within a Jewish history, your spiritual mother the synagogue now rejects you as a rebel son following some crazy carpenter. But only a bit over two hundred years later the Emperor Constantine was converted and essentially asked us– the church, its bishops and administrators– to be the new religious glue that held the world together.¹³ It was quite a conquest, the meaning of which is still argued today. But it would never have happened had urban churches like Pergamum not kept the faith and learned that Jesus had the means to encourage and correct them when needed.

Now I have spun this introduction to let you see some of the links between our modern situation of designer faith– a bit of this and a bit of that at the salad bar of religion– and the cultural background of ancient polytheism where our new and old faith came to birth. So when we read of a young, struggling church in the beautiful and sophisticated city of Pergamum with its huge altar to Zeus atop the nearly thousand foot high mountain overlooking a city of a hundred and fifty thousand, you have a sympathetic feel for their struggles. The city made meaning and did life one way: within a world view of many gods. But the small Christian minority, one of whose members– Antipas– had already been killed, and that struggled internally with teachers who called for the easy way of compromise, did life another way, with a Jesus and Spirit expanded Jewish monotheism, and so there was tension every day and all day long. That helps make sense of a letter they received in a larger document from John the prophet who was exiled off the coast on the isle of Patmos,

¹³ For a positive reappraisal of Constantine and the assembly of bishops at Nicea, see Peter Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of the Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010).

Revelation 2:12-17..... 10

a letter he claimed was given in a vision by the risen Jesus. It is interesting that when the Book of Revelation was read aloud in each of the seven cities, each church heard not only its own letter but all the others, and so learned from one another.

TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

When we come to Pergamum we arrive at a church that was— like us— a mixed bag of faith and compromise. Pergamum was fifteen miles inland from the coast and forty miles north of Smyrna on the same postal route out of Ephesus. Like Smyrna it was a center of Emperor worship and had been so for over a century. In a horrific phrase revealing the ultimate power behind the religious and political institutions of the city, John the visionary says that Pergamum is *where Satan's throne is*, the very epicenter of spiritual evil and religious deception in that part of the world.

If Christ were to reveal to us the strongholds of Satan here in Greenwood, where do you think they would be? What clubs, what organizations, what interests, what cultural outlets, what groups and ideologies are locations from which the Evil One exercises regional influence? How many Klan groups survive? Who controls the drug trade around here? Who's taking bribes and peddling influence? That's what a *throne* is, isn't it, a place to sit and rule, a metaphor for power?

Evil is pervasive; it's everywhere, but there are certain places, which because of their idolatrous history and evil practices, have become a node, a place of focused influence, turf where the Evil One has a more free hand. Like air pollution, it's everywhere, in some places worse than others, and in some places positively deadly with a inversion layer keeping out fresh air. There is, I believe, a geography to evil; some places are darker than others, and so it was in the Lord's diagnosis of Pergamum *where Satan's throne is*. "I know *where* you dwell," said the risen Lord. Think North Korea, think ISIS, think Iranian ayatollahs plotting terrorism, think Miami banks laundering drug money, think those who engage in human trafficking, think the porn industry, think companies that willingly pollute, think churches that have grown bored with Jesus, think marketers who know they are lying, think pastors who adopt a *go along to get along* mentality and who bless immorality with a wink and a smile, think of the inter-generational despair of addictions and pockets of poverty from which there seems to be no escape.

There are just a few of the signs of his infernal influence, and if we cannot name it using biblical terms, how can we pray for strength to resist it? There is an unanswered question in Greenwood, as there is in every city, and it's this: What are the unconfessed sins of ourselves and our ancestors that continue to block the gospel

Revelation 2:12-17..... 11

of Jesus Christ? Where are the resistant strongholds that indicate *where Satan dwells*? When is that last time we had a General Awakening with churches that were *full of the presence*? What on our side of the ledger is blocking the work of God?

Medical scanning has taken tremendous strides in recent decades: CT scans, NMRs, Pet-scans, all peering into the internal landscape of the human body. Same with the vision of the risen Lord, who as he gazes across Pergamum and Greenwood is able to locate persons and places and structures that are given over to evil. The Bible calls them *strong holds*,¹⁴ and our weapons against them are truth and prayer and love and witness and discernment and wisdom and the name and blood of Jesus Christ. Just as physicians now map the internal topography of an individual, so the church in our day needs the discipline of *spiritual mapping*.¹⁵ Why are some areas, even within a town, more open to the Lord than others? Wherever the occult, or idolatry, or crime, or immorality or hatred or abuse or racism has been practiced, there an *invisible spiritual stronghold* may be set up with a corresponding sphere of influence. Ground has been ceded. And though the owner or use of the property changes, the stronghold remains until it is removed through confession, repentance and prayer. Think about that next time you buy a piece of property or sleep in a motel room. Pray over both. You simply don't know what happened there, or what the residues are. One household is Christian and full of life and light; the house next door is full of darkness. You feel the atmosphere change when you walk from the one to the other. How do you explain that? There are reasons for these things. Christ knew the spiritual map and let them know that Pergamum was where *Satan's throne was*. It was a tough neighborhood. Jesus was opening their eyes to what he saw. Satan has influence elsewhere, but *his throne* in Asia Minor was Pergamum. Behind the appearances of our city is a spiritual map we need to study!

I think that the increase in state sanctioned gambling is a growing stronghold. Clubs that are racially exclusive are strongholds no matter how much charity they hide behind or how many prominent citizens are members. Same for neighborhoods that are drug infested. Same for banks that discriminate. Radio and television

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."

¹⁵ George Otis, *Informed Intercession* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 1999) gives the best current summary of this emerging spiritual discipline. See also the collection of papers in Peter Wagner, editor, *Territorial Spirits* (Chichester, England: Sovereign World Ltd., 1991).

Revelation 2:12-17..... 12

stations that spew forth programming that glorifies violence and promiscuity. If we could view this city with the vision of Jesus, we would see a checkered pattern of darkness and light, and it might surprise us where some of the darkness is. Satan has his centers of influence in every community, and it is our job as the church to discern them and then to witness to Christ's power to free people, places and institutions for the healing life of God to flow through them.

The multiple, magnificent temples in Pergamum were impressive, the pride of the city; and yet, if Jesus is to be listened to, they were the very ruling centers of demonic power. To believe the polytheistic world view was to be blinded to the one, true, and living God of the Jews who showed up in Jesus. When you look at a city, things are not as they appear. Behind the avenues and streets is another map, a spiritual map. Satan was active in Smyrna, in Ephesus and in the others cities to which John wrote, but *his throne*, the center of his corrupting influence, was Pergamum. This may help explain the fact that while all cities share a measure of wickedness, some seem darker than others and more spiritually resistant. We live in an outwardly religious but inwardly resistant spiritual climate, and that is something only long and sustained prayer can change. We need intelligence from above.

The church in Pergamum had a good track record at one point in its history. In a time of pressure they held fast the name of Jesus and did not deny the faith. Antipas was executed for his witness, most likely by Roman officials for not doing the required rituals of Emperor worship and for being so stubborn about it. "Antipas, just burn a little incense to the genius of the Emperor and eat a piece of the sacrificial meat is all we ask; then you can go. Don't make us kill you has an example." But he didn't, and they did. Jesus calls him *my faithful one*, quite a title. Antipas was a genuine hero, memorialized in local church lore. In its witness to the outside world the church had remained faithful, but inside it was now another story.

Churches, it seems, exist in three dimensions: 1) our invisible relationship with the Lord Jesus, 2) our relationship with the outside world, and 3) our internal relations. It was the internal life of the church at Pergamum that was weak and in trouble. And, if left unattended, would spoil the other two. Though the language is somewhat opaque, it's clear there were several teachers within the church who were advocating a position of accommodation with the surrounding pagan culture. *Go along to get along* was the philosophy. You don't have to be different to follow Christ. We can participate in the civic and religious life of the city, even banquets at temples eating meat offered in sacrifice to the gods. We may even engage in immorality since it implicates only the body and not the true, inner soul of the

Revelation 2:12-17..... 13

person.¹⁶ What we do with our bodies does not matter; they are secondary to the *real inner self*. Follow Jesus *and* have the best the world has to offer. We can *blend in* instead of *sticking out*. Faith is— after all— a personal, private thing. Long on toleration and lean on holiness. Sound familiar? Sound attractive?

This is the issue every church in America is facing, and some denominations have collapsed before the pressures. In the Bible, immorality and the worship of other gods are always presented in tandem.¹⁷ The people of Israel were often drawn away from Yahweh to the gods and goddesses of Canaan through the avenue of sensuality. When the church becomes the religious handmaid of the culture and its obsessions, the church gives up its reason for being. And it is here, in the worship of the one God and in our attitude to the body, that Christian faith stands most in conflict with the world around us. We will not worship the gods of sex, money, power, leisure, and consumerism our culture worships. And if we do, Christ will expose and shame us, as he now is doing on a large scale. He will war against us with the word of his mouth because truth is the sharpest sword. You know it when you hear it. I have felt the thrust of his sword into my heart when I am tempted not to be honest with Scripture; it is not pleasant, and the sound of it echoes with words like *coward* and *traitor*. Ouch! How would you like to be accountable for truth every Sunday?

Face it; our God is in the truth and exposure business, and if we do not willingly expose ourselves to God's correction all along the way, then our judgment will go public. So Christ, the Lord of the church, issued a sovereign summons for the church at Pergamum to repent. It's a serious warning. But he leaves the choice to them. And if they do not listen, consequences are listed.

When the church tolerates bad teaching and bad behavior based on bad teaching— as at Pergamum, Christ promises to make war against us with the sword of his mouth, the truth found in Holy Scripture. How's that image sit with you? Jesus making war on his own church so it stops imbibing the world's ideologies and indulgences. We love the image of sweet Jesus, meek and mild, knocking on the door of our hearts. So patient, so considerate, so mannerly. Waiting for us to open from the inside. It's true, but it's not the whole truth. We also deal with a Lord whose patience has a limit and who promises to come at us with a sword unless we repent.

¹⁶ A dualist anthropology is defective. Body, soul and spirit are not three entities but three complementary aspects of the one, unified person.

¹⁷ PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2012), 87-90.

Revelation 2:12-17..... 14

He will have his way with us. He bought and paid for us with his own blood!

As I read church history I see this happening. An age of vibrant witness is followed by a time of settling in which leads to compromise with the world which then requires a new reformation and often a set of new martyrs. Whole denominations may wander off the path and wither, but others will soon be raised up as replacements, as God once did with the Methodists in eighteenth century England and America, and then from us the Holiness and Pentecostal movements. We are on the edge of such a shift today, and God knows we need it.

There are two biblical evidences John offers as signs that repentance, a deep turning to the Lord by a church as a whole, is taking effect. The first is that the church is drawing deep nourishment from the Lord himself and not from programs or pastors or religious distractions. That's the meaning of the *hidden manna*, the miracle food God gave the children of Israel fresh each morning in their wilderness wanderings. Repentance creates a new hunger so we can be fed and filled by the Lord himself, as will happen in Holy Communion this morning. The second evidence is fresh intimacy with Jesus Christ, as signaled by the symbol of the white stone and the new name, which were often used in that world as invitations to a banquet.

CONCLUSION

We're a lot like Pergamum aren't we? Like most churches, we're a mixed bag having a hard time holding together a living relationship with the Lord, a solid witness to the world, and an inner life of love and holiness. We have those who stay faithful like Antipas, and we have those who are so enticed by the world's offerings that they keep selling out. We must be willing, as John said to each church, *to hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. What are you hearing Christ say to us here at Main Street? Please let me know! I am a pastor and preacher, not a prophet.

Checklist of Possible Spiritual Openings For Evil (See Ephesians 4:27, 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8-9.)

As you read through the lists, ask the Holy Spirit to recall to your mind every involvement you have had. Keep in mind that many of these activities are clearly of the occult; others may not be as apparent. Please mark any and all activities, even if there is a question in your mind

Revelation 2:12-17..... 15

as to their occult nature, so that you are confident that you renounce all *possible* influences of evil in your life. Place a check beside each item in which you have participated, whether “just for fun,” out of curiosity or in earnest. If there are issues that go beyond simple confession and forgiveness, you may wish to make an appointment with the pastor for counsel and prayer to break any bondages in your life associated with these activities which are forbidden to Christians in Scripture. For a fuller treatment of these issues see Cindy Jacobs, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001).

***Soothsayers/Fortune-tellers:* See Deuteronomy 18:9-16; Isaiah 2:6; Daniel 2:26-28; Acts 16:16.**

1. Have you ever had your fortune told by tea leaves, palm reading, a crystal ball, a fortune-teller or any other means?
2. Have you ever read or followed horoscopes, or had a chart made for yourself to predict your future? Have you every read any other type(s) of birth signs?

***Necromancy, Spiritualism:* See Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; 1 Samuel 28:7-11; 2 Kings 21:6; Isaiah 8:19-22.**

3. Have you every attended a seance or spiritualist meeting?
4. Do you believe in reincarnation? Have you ever had a reincarnation reading?
5. Have you every played with a Ouija board, crystal ball, Dungeons & Dragons or other occult games?
6. Have you ever had a tarot card reading or practiced cartomancy (using playing cards for fortune-telling or other magical purposes)?
7. Have you ever played games of an occult nature, using ESP, telepathy, hypnotism, etc?
8. Have you every consulted a medium, spiritualist or numerologist? Have you every acted as a medium? Have you every practiced channeling?
9. Have you every sought healing through magic spells or charms or through a spiritualist? Have you ever used a charm or amulet of any kind for protection or “good luck?” Are you superstitious?
10. Have you every practiced table lifting, levitation of objects, pendulum swinging, lifting of bodies, automatic writing, astral travel or soul travel?

***Occult Books, “Contact” Objects and Other Media:* See Exodus 19:25-20:6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10, 7:25-26; 2 Kings 23:1-25; Psalm 97:7; Isaiah 42:17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.**

11. Do you have anything in your home that was given to you by someone in the occult? Do you have anything in your home of an occult nature? Have you followed the writings of Edgar Cayce, Jean Dixon or a New Age author? Do you own or like to view demonic types of books or movies?

***Sorcery or Magic:* See 2 Kings 17:17, 21:6; Malachi 3:5; Acts 8:11, 13:4-12, 19:19-20.**

12. Have you every practiced sorcery or magic?
13. Have you every practiced mind control over any person or animal, cast a magic spell or sought a psychic in person or through a psychic hotline?

***Sins of the Flesh, Sins of the Eyes:* See Matthew 5:28; Romans 6:12-14, 8:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18-20; Galatians 5:16-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; James 1:14-15; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:16.**

14. Have you ever used LSD, marijuana, cocaine, crack-cocaine or any mind-expanding or mind-altering drugs? Have you ever abused prescription drugs? Have you ever had a problem with alcohol?
15. Have you ever exposed yourself to pornography in magazine, TV or stage shows, books, topless bars or movies?
16. Have you ever been involved in sexual deviation, homosexuality or lesbianism?
17. Have you ever had sexual relations with a person who was not your legal spouse?
18. Have you had an abortion? Have you fathered a child who was aborted? Have you been involved in abortion in any way (viewed/witnessed one, assisted in one, performed one, encouraged a friend to have one)?

***Devil Worship:* See 2 Chronicles 11:15; Psalm 106:37; 1 Corinthians 10:20-22; Revelation 9:20-21, 13:4.**

19. Have you ever made a pact with Satan or been involved in or witnessed Satan worship or black magic?

***Witchcraft:* See 1 Samuel 15:23, 28:7; 2 Kings 9:22, 23:24; Isaiah 8:19, 19:3, 29:4; Micah 5:12.**

20. Have you ever attended witchcraft or voodoo activities?

***Death:* See Exodus 20:13; Job 3:20-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.**

21. Have you every planned or attempted to take your own life?
 22. Have you ever planned or attempted to take someone else’s life?
-