

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Chapter 2:12-17

Topic

Jesus tells the believers in Pergamos
that Satan is living in their city

Title

“Please Don’t You Be My Neighbor”

I’ll name the neighbors... You name the show:

- ☞ Fred & Ethyl Mertz (*I Love Lucy*)
- ☞ Ed & Trixie Norton (*The Honeymooners*)
- ☞ Barney & Betty Rubble (*The Flintstones*)
- ☞ Lenny & Squiggy (*Laverne & Shirley*)
- ☞ Ned Flanders (*The Simpsons*)
- ☞ Wilson W. Wilson, Jr. (*Home Improvement*)

One more to show that I’m on the cutting edge: Agnes (*WandaVision*).

While the majority of television neighbors are rather likable, movie neighbors can be your worst nightmare. You can probably think of a film in which the neighbor turned out to be anything but Fred Rogers. I submit Lars Thorwald in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, with an Honorable Mention going to the Klopek’s in *The Burbs*.

The believers in the church in Pergamos had a supremely undesirable neighbor.

Who was their neighbor? As the Church Lady would say, "Satan!"

Jesus said, in verse thirteen, "Where you dwell... Satan dwells." The devil had his "throne" there. It was *not* a good day in the neighborhood with Satan going about singing, "Won't you be mine?"

Satan wasn't only living in their city. He was attending their church.

Not personally, but through certain false teachers he had equipped. In verses fourteen and fifteen, Jesus said, "You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam... You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans..." The Lord wanted the believers to take action against them.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Hold Fast And You Reveal Jesus Enthroned**, and **#2 Hold Loosely And You Reveal Satan Enthroned**.

#1 - Hold Fast And You Reveal Jesus Enthroned (v12-13)

There are two symbols that are used to represent medicine:

- ☞ The Caduceus is a symbol with a short staff entwined by two serpents.
- ☞ The Rod of Asclepius is the one with a single serpent.

Isn't it weird? Why serpents? It reaches back through the centuries to mythology.

Pergamos was especially known for its temple to Asclepius, the god of medicine. People from all over the world traveled to Pergamos hoping to be healed. The method for healing was unorthodox. William Barclay writes:

Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple. In the temple there were tame snakes. In the night the sufferer might be touched by one of these tame and harmless snakes as it glided over the ground on which

he lay. The touch of the snake was held to be the touch of the god himself, and the touch was held to bring health and healing.

Satan was similarly slithering around the church seeking to 'touch' the believers - not for healing but for havoc and for harm.

Rev 2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

The Revelation that John wrote out on a scroll was carried from church-to-church in the region we know today as Turkey.

It would be read aloud by the "angel" of the church. "Angel" means *messenger*. *Strong's Concordance* comments that it "implies the pastor."

John gave a detailed description of Jesus in chapter one. We read that, "Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (1:16). That observation is now edited by the Holy Spirit to read, "He who has the sharp two-edged sword."

You've probably seen a representation of Jesus with a "two-edged sword" coming out of His mouth. Are we to take this literally? I mean, we *are* the literalists, aren't we?

We've mentioned how dependent the Revelation is on Old Testament references; and we've said that Jews would understand references that we miss for lack of Old Testament familiarity. A Jew, upon hearing about a sharp sword coming out of the mouth, would remember Isaiah writing, "And He has made My **mouth like a sharp sword...**" (49:2).

Other translations include, "He made my words like a sharp sword," and "He gave me speech that would cut and penetrate."

If you read the entire Isaiah passage, you see that it is describing God's Suffering Servant - the Messiah who would save Israel. *It's a prophecy about Jesus.*

So, no, Jesus doesn't have a sword coming out of His mouth. It is a well-known expression for the power of His speech.

It's the perfect attribute of Jesus for Pergamos because the words of these false teachers needed to be dealt with by the sword of the Word.

Rev 2:13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. 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.

The words "your works" do not appear in the best manuscripts. The emphasis was on knowing where they dwelt. Not just the city; that's obvious. Jesus let the saints know that their city was Ground Zero for the devil. Pergamos was "Satan's throne."

It seems that the nations of the world have angels, both good and fallen, assigned to them:

- ☞ In the Book of Daniel, a mighty fallen angel called the Prince of Persia detained the angel Gabriel from coming to Daniel.
- ☞ Also in Daniel we read that the Archangel Michael is "The great prince who stands *watch* over [Israel]."

Satan is called the "god of this world," and as such it is logical that he would have a headquarters.

"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." The Bible tells us nothing more about Antipas. He was an impressive one-verse wonder.

Faced with the pressure to deny Jesus or die a violent death, Antipas chose to die a martyr, and the believers stood with him, willing to become martyrs themselves.

Martyrdom seems a triumph for evil. Looking back on church history, we see that it is, in fact, a victory for the Lord, every time.

You probably know that the word “martyr” means *witness*. We who are in Christ are all witnesses who by holding fast to Jesus could become martyrs.

You might think martyrdom is the ultimate witness.

It can be harder to live for Jesus than to die for Him.

I freely admit that I am not the most qualified Christian to say that. Sadhu Sundar Singh is. He is credited as the first missionary to cross the Himalayan Mountains to take the gospel to Nepal and Tibet. One source said, “He was known as, ‘the apostle with the bleeding feet’ for he walked far and long.” At thirty-six-years-of-age he made his last trip over the mountains. He never returned and is assumed by some to have been a martyr for Jesus.

In his diary he had written, “It is easy to die for Christ. It is hard to live for Him. Dying takes only a few minutes - or at worst an hour or two - **but to live for Christ means to die daily to myself.**”

Beloved, in our daily lives we have opportunities to show the world that Jesus is on the throne, so to speak. All we need to do is die to self.

Where do you need to die to yourself and thereby reveal Jesus enthroned?

#2 - Hold Loosely And You Reveal Satan Enthroned (v14-17)

Sauron was defeated largely because of Gandalf’s hidden strategy to destroy the one ring of power. With the good guys coming at the bad guys head on, the Great Eye of Barad-dûr was kept distracted until it was too late.

Satan was employing a similar strategy. As the bad guy, he came at the believers head-on. He killed Antipas. But while the saints were faithfully enduring a direct assault, the serpent had secretly slithered in to their midst.

Satan is always playing the long-game.

You don't know what it is. *But you can be prepared for it.*

That's one reason it is so important to continue in doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

They were "there," not just in the city, but in the meetings of the church.

Balaam's story is recorded in chapters twenty-two through twenty-four of the Old Testament Book of Numbers. The nation of Israel was marching from Egypt to the Promised Land. No Gentile nation could withstand them on their journey as they walked with God through the wilderness. They seemed invincible.

King Balak of Moab was terrified of them. He sent for a Gentile seer named Balaam, to employ him to curse the nation of Israel. Three times Balaam tried to curse them but each time God overcame him and the words he spoke blessed them instead.

Unable to curse them, but still desiring the money that Balak had offered him, Balaam counseled Balak on how he might yet stop the march of the Jews.

Balaam understood that the only way to defeat them was to entice them to sin against God. Then God would step in to discipline them Himself.

Balaam told Balak to send the temple priestesses into the camp of Israel to seduce the Jewish men into celebrating their pagan feast of Baal-Peor. The feast involved idolatry *and* sexual immorality.

The plan worked. The Israelite men worshipped idols, and had sex with the priestesses.

Their sin had devastating results. God sent a plague into the camp of the Israelites, as a discipline, that killed twenty-four thousand of them.

Jewish men were sinning openly...God was killing people...And no one was doing a thing about it!

Then this happened:

Num 25:6 And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Num 25:7 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand;

Num 25:8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel.

These folks in Pergamos did not call themselves Balaamites. Jesus exposed them by using the story from Numbers. They were little Balaams.

What were the Pergamos Balaamites promoting?

“To eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” A portion of the meat served in the various temples was first offered in sacrifice to the god of that temple. The worship of the gods involved sexually immoral practices.

The influence of the Balaamites was to tell the saints it was fine - even mature - to visit the pagan temples. Go ahead, eat the sacrificed meat. And, ultimately, engage in the immoral sexual practices there.

The problem was compounded because food was served all the time in the temples, not just in religious rituals. There were food booths and restaurants.

In those days, you didn't go to McDonalds; you went to McDionysus... Or to Bacchus King... Poseidon Hut... Cronos Junior... Little Caesars... Taco Baal.

The temple food was superb. But it was food that had been offered to an idol, leading to idolatry and sexual sin.

Is the church today under assault from within by Balaamites? Let me preface my remarks by quoting from Genesis:

"So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27).

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (2:24)

There are two genders: Male and female. Marriage is one biological male and one biological female in an exclusive heterosexual, monogamous covenant of companionship for as long as they both shall live.

A quick look at Wikipedia identifies twenty-two denominations in North America (Protestant and Catholic) that affirm the LGBTQ agenda. They no longer acknowledge that homosexuality or transgender identity are sexual sins.

It didn't occur overnight. Balaamites slithered in to the North American denominations. Unlike the snakes in the temple of Asclepius, *these snakes are deadly poisonous.*

In related news: The Australian province of Victoria has criminalized prayer that seeks to change a person's sexual orientation.

The offense is punishable by imprisonment for up to ten years. UK activists are lobbying for similar legislation.¹ It will be coming our way soon.

Rev 2:15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Pages-and-pages have been written on these guys to no avail in solving exactly what they believed and taught. *It's a good thing we don't know more about them.* If we did, we'd concentrate on their particular teachings. Instead we can see them as a placeholder for *any* and *all* false teachings.

Here is a quote on the subject of tolerance:

The original definition of tolerance and the way in which the word is used now are quite different. Originally, tolerance meant to acknowledge that others have differing beliefs and accept that it is their right to do so. In this way, Christians are to absolutely be tolerant. Recently, tolerance has come to mean accepting that those other beliefs are true - something Christians absolutely cannot do.

Rev 2:16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The saints were tolerating sin in their church. Up until then, there was no Phinehas to wield God's Word against them.

There is a very strong distinction between "you" - the believers - and "them" - the false teachers. The believers should do something about "them" or else the Lord would come and deal with it.

You might think, "That's great! Let the Lord handle it." That isn't how we ought to think.

¹ <https://reformationcharlotte.org/2021/02/10/australian-province-criminalizes-prayer-for-sexual-orientation-change-punishable-by-prison-for-10-years/>

The apostle Paul urged the factious believers in Corinth to set things in order *before* he arrived.

He put it this way: "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (First Corinthians 4:21).

The saints in Pergamos ought to "repent" by immediately doing something about the problem. Otherwise the Lord would, but it probably would also involve a "rod" of discipline.

Rev 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

☞ "He who has an ear" means the things in these letters are for *any* believer at *any* time.

☞ "What the Spirit says to the churches" (plural) means that the things in each letter are for *any* church at *any* time.

"Him who overcomes" is not a super-saint. In one of his letters in the New Testament, John says a born-again believer in Jesus is an overcomer.

The average, everyday believer in Jesus Christ can count on some things in the future.

He or she can expect some of "the hidden manna to eat." Manna was the bread that fell from Heaven which fed the children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. The "hidden manna" refers to the manna that was put in the Ark of the Covenant that was covered by the Mercy Seat within the Holy of Holies of the wilderness Tabernacle.

To eat some of the hidden manna you would need to be in the Holy of Holies in God's Temple.

Any moment, the church could be in Heaven, in God's Temple. Why get so insistent about indulging our flesh at the 'temples' of the world when we will one day be in Heaven?

The wilderness-wandering Jews grew tired of eating only manna. *So can we.* In our case, the manna is God's Word. We want to add to it ingredients from the world.

I was thumbing through an old recipe book when I came across one recipe that called for ammonia. You probably already knew that there is a kind of ammonia used in baking - ammonium carbonate. I didn't. (Don't worry; I didn't kill anyone).

The world that Satan is god over urges you to add its ingredients. You are prone to add something deadly. Christian con carnal is not good.

"And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

Apparently it was common to use stones the way we use tickets. Think of it like having a wristband or a hand stamp that allows you access to an event.

The ultimate invitation... The capital "E" coupon... Is our invitation to the future Marriage Supper of Jesus that believers are going to attend as His bride.

My mom used to tell me junk food would ruin my appetite for dinner. The junk food of the world system Satan heads can ruin our spiritual appetites.

"And on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

It's pretty common for believers to be renamed:

☞ In the Old Testament, Abram was renamed Abraham, Sarai was renamed Sarah, and Jacob was renamed Israel.

☞ In the New Testament, Jesus told Simon that he would be called Peter.

Do you have endearing, pet names for those you love? A name that no one else is really allowed to use? That's the idea here.

Satan was not only their *nemesis*, trying to kill more believers like he did Antipas. He was their *neighbor*. He was in church with them.

I don't know where Satan's throne is today. It's probably not where we'd guess. It doesn't matter anyway; we're not told to try to discover it. Or to do anything to assail it. Our warfare is right in front of us.

If you are in Christ, you desire to reveal Jesus enthroned. Remember the words of Sundar Singh:

“Dying takes only a few minutes - or at worst an hour or two - but to live for Christ means to die daily to myself.”