Christ Among the Churches Part 2
Revelation 2:12-17

The Problem of Compromise—The Message to Pergamos (2:12-17)

The place of Pergamos in history... “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write... (2:12a).

1. The importance of Pergamos... It was the capital of Asia Minor for almost 400 years; along with Ephesus was recognized by historian Pliny as “the most famous city in Asia;” it was the center of culture with a library of over 200,000 parchment rolls, second only to Alexandria, Egypt; the word “parchment” is derived from Pergamos; it was also famous for having the first school of psychology in Asia Minor.

2. The ideology of Pergamos... The city was a custodian and defender of the Greek way of life because in 240 BC the Greeks stopped an invasion of barbarians that sought to overthrow the city; in memory of that victory an altar to Zeus was built; it was built in front of the Temple of Athena and every day smoke rose from sacrifices to Zeus; around the base was carved one of the great achievements in the world of sculpture showing the Battle of the Giants in which the gods of Greece were victorious over the giants of the barbarians.

The city was also connected with Asclepios, the god of healing whose idol was shaped like a serpent which still appears as a symbol of medicine; Asclepios was known as “the Pergamene god” and wealthy people would come from all over the world to seek healing from the priests and doctors at the temple of Asclepios.

Pergamos was also a center of Caesar worship where it began as a means unifying the vast and heterogeneous empire; to many, Rome had brought
peace, prosperity and even-handed justice; many were seeking something
divine in the spirit of Rome and the belief was this spirit was incarnated in
the Emperor and temples were erected in his honor; at first Caesar worship
was voluntary but over time it became law and every Roman citizen was
required to go once a year to the temple of the Emperor and burn a pinch of
incense to Caesar and say: “Caesar is Lord”; having done that they would
receive a written certificate; it was never the intent of Rome to make Caesar
worship exclusive, rather, having confessed “Caesar as Lord” they could
worship any god they chose; this was a problem for Christians for there was
no other Lord but Jesus.

3. The implication in the name Pergamos... It means “mixed” (per) “marriage”
(gamos); it became a place where paganism and Christianity married; it was
a city where Christians would compromise their faith; too many surrendered
to Caesar and proclaimed him as Lord.

The portrayal of Christ... “He who has the sharp two edged sword...” (2:12b);
there were Roman governors who had what was called “the right of the sword”;
they were given the power of life and death; on their command a man could be
sentenced to death on the spot; they had their headquarters at Pergamos and at
any time one might use that power against a Christian; this letter to the church
was to never forget that Christ is He who has the sharp two edged sword in His
hand meaning He too has the power of life and death.

The place of Satan’s throne... “I know your works and where you dwell, where
Satan’s throne is...,” (2:13a); the Risen Lord is acknowledging that to live in
Pergamos is dangerous for a Christian because it was a center for Caesar
worship; idolatry abounded and it was easy to compromise your faith.

The pleasure of Christ...“And you hold fast 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” (2:13b); the Lord commends the faithfulness of many
believers living in difficult times; Tertullian writes that Antipas met his death by
being placed within a brazen bull and slowly roasted to death; Jesus refers to
Antipas as “a faithful martyr” (martus) which is the normal Greek word for
“witness;” to witness for Christ often meant martyrdom; to be a true witness
means a willingness to give your life for Christ.
The problem with the church at Pergamos... “But I have a few things against you... there are those who hold the doctrine of Balaam... and those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which I hate” (2:14-15).

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The Doctrine of Balaam

The story of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-26; he was a false prophet hired by Balak, king of the Moabites to curse Israel because the king knew he could not defeat them in warfare; Balaam was willing to curse Israel for money and fame; but God turned his curses into blessings; he could not destroy Israel with his curses, but he could defile Israel with his council; he seduced the Israelites into disobeying God by suggesting to Balak that he invite the Hebrews to the religious feast of the Moabites; the doctrine of Balaam was to compromise your faith: idolatry... “eat things sacrificed to idols (2:14b) and immorality... “To commit sexual immorality” (2:14c; 2 Peter 2:12-17); he even persuaded Israeli men to marry Moabite women (Numbers 25:1-9); wives among Israelites must be Israelites (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Chronicles 23:22; Ezra 9:1, 2, 12; Nehemiah 10:30; 13:26, 27; Malachi 2:11); God’s people are called to be separate from the world (2 Corinthians 6:14,17); other sins of Balaam were making deceitful money from religion (2 Peter 2:15) and for that God would curse Israel (Jude 11).

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The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

The Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, who was one of the seven deacons in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:5); he became a heretic and introduced false teaching into the churches; his followers sought to introduce a freedom of licentiousness thus abusing Paul’s doctrine of grace; they believed in antinomianism, meaning “against law” (Romans 6:1); Christ ended the law, therefore live as you please; the body is evil so sin cannot be helped; God’s grace means do as you please and you will be forgiven.

Doc Beshore in his book on Revelation writes that it was the church at Pergamos that first separated the clergy from the laity as the clergy began to rule over the local congregation; according to C.I. Schofield, the word Nicolaitan comes from
nkao, “to conquer” and laos “laity”; if correct, “that refers to the earliest form of a priestly order or clergy which later divided an equal brotherhood into ‘priests’ and ‘laity’; this elevating of the clergy over the laity became the seed out of which Roman Catholicism grew; it created a hierarchical structure within the Church.

The local pastor and eldership do have a position of authority within the congregation and the members are to submit to their leadership (see Hebrews 13:17); however, the authority the pastor and elders have over the local church comes from God through His Word; no pastor or elder has a right to ask anyone to do anything that the Word of God does not tell them to do; no pastor or elder should see themselves as above their congregation as we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-29); I used to say to my congregation: “The only reason I am higher than you is that I am standing on this platform and you are seated in the assembly”; the problem with a hierarchical structure, where clergy is above the laity, is that it creates a caste system within the Church.

In this caste system, priests have the power to forgive sin as Christ’s representatives on earth; Christ, not man, is the one and only Mediator who can forgive sin (1 Timothy 2:5); every believer can say to another, “Your sins are forgiven,” not because they have forgiven the sin, but because they know that God has forgiven them.

The word “priest” belongs to every Christian believer—not just ecclesiastical leaders (1 Peter 2:5,9); likewise the word “clergy” belongs to every Christian—not just ecclesiastical leaders; the evidence: Peter instructed pastors to shepherd the flock, exercising oversight over “God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:1-3 KJV); the word “heritage,” (kleeron), also translated “entrusted” (NKJV) is the Greek word for “clergy”; as Matthew Henry points out, all the children of God are given the title of “heritage” or “clergy;” every believer is a member of the clergy because every believer is to do “the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:11-12); when local autonomy was taken away from the local congregation, this began a hierarchy within the Church with bishops ruling over several congregations; this ultimately paved the way for the papacy and the Roman Church.

The plan for Pergamos... “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth” (2:16); God’s Word is “sharper than any two edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12); Paul spoke of God’s Word as “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17); in Christ’s words there
must be sincere repentance or judgment will come through the power of His Word

The promise for Pergamos... “To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And... a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (2:17); “the hidden manna” was the true bread from heaven which God gave the children of Israel to eat in the wilderness (Exodus 16:33, 34; Hebrews 9:4).

The rabbis had a legend that when Solomon’s temple was destroyed, Jeremiah hid the pot of manna in a cleft in Mt. Sinai; when the Messiah comes, Jeremiah will accompany Him and the pot of manna will be discovered again; to the Jew, to eat the hidden manna meant to enjoy the blessings of the Messianic age; it also carried the idea that the overcomers were those who would not share in pagan feasts, but one day will feast in heaven upon heavenly food.

The stone with a new name on it was a reference to the pagans wearing an amulet that would have special powers; it was common practice for pagans to carry precious metals like gold, silver, or a diamond; the poor had only a stone but the name of their god was inscribed on it; the stone was considered good luck and the belief that their god would protect and give them mastery over the demons; the Risen Lord is promising His people absolute security and that they would be safe in life or in death because they know the name and the nature of the one true God—something pagans did not know.

The manna represented God’s provision; the white stone represented God’s protection.

The Age of Accommodation and Pergamos

- All false religion began in Babylon with Nimrod and his one world government and one world religion (Genesis 11).

- A people known as the Chaldeans were the priests of the Babylonian system; the head priest had the title of “Pontifex”; the origin of the word pope.
When Cyrus conquered Babylon in 538 BC, the center of Babylonian religion was moved to Pergamos; the king of Pergamos was called Pontifex Maximus, the high priest of the Babylonian pagan system.

The Babylonian religious system was later transferred to Rome by the Etruscans, a colony from western Turkey that in the 6th Century BC settled near Rome; they became a very wealthy and powerful people; they have been called “the teachers of Rome”; the first king of Rome was Etruscan and took the title Pontifex Maximus.

When Rome conquered the world, the paganism that had spread from Babylon was merged into the religious system of Rome; this included the idea of a Supreme Pontiff; thus Babylonian paganism first carried out under Nimrod was united under one man at Rome: Julius Caesar who in 63 BC was recognized as Pontifex Maximus.

In 312 AD Constantine set out to defeat the forces of Maxentius, his rival for the supreme power of Rome; he said he saw a shining cross in the sky with the inscription, “In this sign you shall conquer”; he had a dream the following night in which Christ supposedly appeared to him and told him to make the labarum, which would be the standard symbol for his army; Eusebius describes the sign as Chi (X) with a “Ch” sound traversed by Rho (P) with the “R” sound; it was a symbol representing the first two letters of the Greek language spelling the word Christos or Christ; in 315 AD Constantine had a medallion and later coins made with XP emblazoned on the helmet which he wore; once he defeated Maxentius he converted to Christianity and assumed himself as head of the Church of Rome and took the title “Pontifex Maximus”.

Constantine repealed the persecution edicts of Diocletian and sought to bring heathens to Christianity by Christianizing ancient Babylonian-Roman practices; it was called “the doctrine of accommodation”; pagan temples became churches; he had coins made with both the images of the Greek God Apollo and Christ on them; he ordained the observance of Sunday worship as Solis Dies, Day of the Sun, so named after Nimrod the sun-god and Tammuz, the son of the sun-god.
Examples of the Doctrine of Accommodation and the Roman Catholic Church

- The head of the Chaldean priesthood in Babylon was called “the Pontiff”; he was declared “infallible”; in 378 AD, the bishop of Rome, Damascus, took the title “Pontiff”; in 440, Pope Leo was first to be called “the Pontiff” or “Pope” of the Roman Catholic Church.

- The miter worn on the head of the pope is in the shape of a fish and comes from the Babylonian and Philistine god, Dagon; the word *dag* is commonly translated “fish” in the OT; Dagon means “fish god” but recognized as “savior”; ancient Mesopotamian art depicts Dagon wearing a miter shaped like the head of a fish, with a cloak covering his back depicting a scaly, fan-like tail leaving the hands and feet exposed.

- Semiramis, the mythological wife to Nimrod was called “goddess” and “Mother of gods” having given birth to Tammuz, the reincarnation of the sun-god Nimrod; in 381 the Catholic Church developed the “veneration of Mary” and called her “Mother of God.”

- In 1050 the Catholic Church adopted an instrument called a rosary—a chain of 15 sets of small beads, each 3 set marked off with one large bead; the ends of the chain are joined by a metal bearing the imprint of Mary; from this hangs a short chain at the end of which is a crucifix; the beads are for counting prayers to Mary—prayers that are repeated over and over again which goes as follows: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death, Amen;” prayer beads are not of Christian origin, but find its origin in ancient paganism; about 800 BC the Phoenicians had a circle of beads used to worship Astarte, the mother goddess; beads for counting prayers were known in ancient Greece, and appeared as a necklace on the statue of the goddess Diana; millions of Hindus in India use a chain of beads containing the names of 1008 gods in their worship of Silva, the Hindu god of destruction (There are over 330 million gods in Hinduism); the Muslims have a bead-string consisting of 33, 66, 99 beads used for counting the names of Allah.
The Chaldeans referred to Semiramis as “the Queen of Heaven” (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17); in 1951 Pope Pius XII officially proclaimed the doctrine of the “assumption of Mary” as her body never saw corruption but was taken to heaven and officially given the title “Queen of Heaven.”

The Chaldeans worshipped Tammuz with the “sign of the cross,” which was no Christian cross at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians—the true original form of the letter T—the initial for the name of Tammuz; it was marked in baptism on the foreheads of those initiated into the Babylonian Mysteries; the mystic Tau was a symbol of divinity and called “the sign of life”; it was used as an amulet over the heart; it marked the garments of the pagan priests of Rome and borne by kings as a token of their divinely conferred authority; Catholicism accommodated “the sign of the cross” in the third century as honoring the Trinity; it is done in the form of T and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Chaldean priests were celibate; when the Babylonian goddess, Cybele was introduced into pagan Rome, it came in its primitive form of a celibate clergy; later, a priestly celibacy was enforced in the Catholic Church where the Pope, priests, and nuns are forbidden to marry, even though Peter, whom Catholics call their first pope, was married (Mark 1:29-31).

The Chaldeans made images of their gods called “icons”; the pagans placed a halo around the heads of those who were gods in their pictures; the Catholic Church began making statues of Christ on the cross, the virgin Mary and various saints to whom they pray and venerate; Catholic art has halos painted over the heads of Christ and Mary as well as various saints.

The date of December 25th for Christmas was adopted by Roman bishop Julian around 350 AD; it was designed to correspond with the Roman festivals of Saturnalia; Saturn was the Roman god of agriculture and celebrated December 17-24; and the Winter Solstice, Brunalia, celebrated the rebirth of the sun on December 25; Brunalia was a time of exchanging gifts, decorating a fir tree with egg shaped bulbs symbolizing life and fertility from the sun; the Catholic Church developed a Christ-Mass in honor of the birth of God’s Son while Brunalia was honored in the rebirth of the sun.

In 325 at the Council of Nicea, the Church under Constantine officially set Easter to be on the first Sunday of the full moon which coincides with the
spring equinox; the name Easter is not a Christian term; it can be traced to
the fertility goddess Astarte, who among the people of Nineveh was
worshipped as Ishtar; the resemblance between Ishtar and Easter is easily
recognized; many of the things that accompany the celebration of Easter
attest to the fact that it had a Babylon origin; the hot cross buns of “Good
Friday” were part of the worship of Ishtar, “the queen of heaven,” as were
the dyed eggs of Easter Sunday connected to her as the fertility goddess;
the forty day abstinence of Lent, preceding Easter was directly borrowed
from the Babylonian goddess; all of this was part of Chaldean worship
1500 years before Christianity.

Information from The Two Babylons by Alexander Hislop, 1959 edition; Loizeaux
Brothers; Babylon Mystery Religion by Ralph Woodrow, 1966, Woodrow
Evangelistic Association

The church at Pergamos represents the age of accommodation when the church
began to separate the clergy from the laity, and then developed a hierarchical
system that used pagan practices to influence pagans into Christianity; the effect
was to more paganize the Church than to Christianize it.