

The Testimony of the Redeemed

If you are a professing Christian, in one way or another your life is a witness about Jesus Christ. Your life is either a good testimony, or it is a bad one!

Sometimes a person is called to testify in a court of law as a character witness on behalf of someone else. Suppose you were on trial for stealing something. And your lawyer said to you, “you need to get someone here that will testify on your behalf so the judge will see that you are not the kind of person who would steal.”

So you have your friend Bob come and testify on your behalf as a character witness. And the prosecuting attorney asks your friend, “Bob, have you ever stolen something.” And Bob said, “My friends and I steal things all the time. In fact, I robbed a 7-11 on the way over here.” Now, Bob has given testimony on your behalf.” But the testimony will hurt your reputation with the judge, not help it.

As we will see today, many otherwise good churches gain bad reputations because of the sins some of its people won’t repent of.

Read Revelation 2:12-17 PRAY!

Things we know about Pergamum:

- If we left Smyrna driving north in a car, it would take about an hour to get to Pergamum
- Like Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was a capitol of one of the provinces of Asia Minor (County Seat)
- It was the administrative center of Rome in Asia Minor, meaning its governor could put people to death
- This right to practice capitol punishment was symbolized by the sword
- It had the only provincial temple to Augustus Caesar (who reigned when Jesus was born)
- The city boasted of being the official temple where Caesar was worshipped
- A university was there, as well as a library with 200,000 volumes (only Alexandria had more)
- Later those volumes were sent to Alexandria as a gift from Antony to Cleopatra
- Pergamum was the place where animal skins were first used to write on, called at first pergamena
- So scrolls made of parchment could replace the more fragile and less enduring papyrus
- If that hadn’t happened, we would have a lot fewer copies of God’s Word!
- Pergamum had the largest altar in the world, the Temple of Zeus, one of the 7 wonders of the world
- It was on a high hill, towering 800 feet over the plain (nearly three football fields)
- There were many other temples too, most notably one to Aesculapius, the god of healing or medicine
- We get the word scalpel from Aesculapius
- This supposed god of healing was worshipped under the form of a snake

V. 12 Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Judge of our behavior

To the church in Pergamum, where they were pressured by those who judged with the sword, Jesus introduces Himself as the One with the sharp, two edged sword!

Verse twelve is very interesting in the Greek:

“Here there is added emphasis by the repeated use of the article before the word sword and before each adjective. Christ is described as having THE sword, THE two-edged one, THE sharp one.”

-John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, page 66

To understand what this means we have to know Hebrews 4:12-13

“For the Word of God is sharper than any two edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart. No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” -Hebrews 4:12-13

Jesus’ title as the One with the two edged sword emphasizes that He is our ultimate Judge! The sword is the Word of God, more powerful than any physical sword!

Two edged means it divides. On the one hand it brings comfort to those who repent and turn to Jesus and enjoy Him; on the other hand, it brings condemnation to those who refuse to repent.

V. 13 Most of the church in Pergamum had a great testimony for Jesus

Jesus says to the church, I know where you live! You live where Satan’s throne is, one of the most difficult places to serve me!

There are several possibilities about what Satan’s throne could refer to- the kind of satanic power seen in Caesar worship and persecution. The temple to Zeus with its built in idol worship. The temple to Aesculapius, worshipped in snake like form.

It’s probably best to view “Satan’s throne” as being a composite of all these pagan influences, the same influences Christians of all time have had to deal with living in godless cultures where false ideas flourish and enslave.

I wonder if any of you live where Satan’s throne is.

In a family that doesn’t believe, and when it comes to Christians, you’re it!

Jesus says to you, “I know where you live!” I know the pressure your spouse puts on you to watch pornographic videos and do the things in them. I know your friends try to pressure you to get drunk or do drugs with them like you used to.

I know you face pressure to compromise your faith all the time.

So did the church in Pergamum! And just like the church in Smyrna, in verse 13 Jesus commends those in Pergamum in 13 who had held on to His name and not denied their faith, even as they faced the forces of Satan! As Jesus wrote them, they were still grieving the martyrdom of Antipas, killed for his faith.

We don't know anything more about Antipas than his name, which means "against all!"

Like the Tom Petty song, Antipas had been backed up against the gates of Hell, but he had not backed down! He preferred death to compromising his faith!

Oh, I hope more than anything else in life you want to be a faithful witness like Antipas! OH, the church never forgets it's faithful witnesses like Antipas! It's Larry Whittens! It's Barbara Spradlin's! It's Phil Harman's!

The same was said of Jesus in Revelation 1:5, that He was THE faithful witness!

V. 14-15 Some in the church need to repent of a bad testimony for Jesus

Notice verse fourteen starts by saying, "you have a few." Folks, it only takes a few people disobeying God to cause damage to an entire churches' reputation.

It appears that most people there wanted to be like Antipas, faithful no matter what. But a few were there for the wrong reasons! And here Jesus speaks of them.

What was behind the problems some had in Pergamum: Holding False Ideas!

Behind the sins they were committing were ideas put there by false teachers, ideas the "few" had believed.

Back in the Old Testament book of Numbers a pagan king named Balak employed a supposed prophet named Balaam to curse Israel. He tried several times to do it, but words of blessing for Israel came out of his mouth each time instead! Balak got angry and refused to pay Balaam. So Balaam, desperate to get paid, told Balak what to do. He said, "Balak, if you'll dress up your girls in skimpy outfits and send them over to those Israelite boys, those boys will forget their faith in a hurry, take up with your girls and even start worshipping your idols so they can stay with those girls." And that's exactly what happened!

The teaching of Balaam encouraged God's people to compromise their faith by participating in the sinful practices of those they lived among.

Now verse fifteen tells us that the teaching of the Nicolaitans was along the same lines. In verse five Jesus had said he hates the practices of the Nicolaitans.

Now what are the hated practices of the Nicolaitans?
The bottom line is that we are not sure.

Some think that because niko means to conquer and laos means the people, or laity, this refers to early efforts to set up a papacy "over the laity." They point out you can also interpret Balaam's name to mean "over the people."

That view seems to me to smack of reading later developments back into the text, though! On this view the main problem is the coming dominance by Constantine and then the papal system on local churches. It goes with the whole church/age view we discussed briefly last week.

Others think the deacon Nicolas in Acts 6 had gone bad and seduced others to follow him. This was the prevailing view among the early church "fathers." On their view this sect took "freedom in Christ" to mean that they were free to participate in heathen feasts and free love. I think that view, whether or not it was the same Nicholas as Acts 6, is the one to go with, because verse 15 says the Nicolaitans teaching was held the same way the Balaam teaching was.

The end of verse fourteen tells us the two ways these false ideas were mainly lived out: idolatry and immorality.

In essence, the false teachers were teaching that it was okay to try and have the best of both worlds. They said, "Believe in Jesus so you can go to Heaven, but don't miss the party at Caesar's palace this week! It's not really sin. God understands the needs you have- He made you that way."

Notice that what Satan could not accomplish from persecuting the church from the outside, had been accomplished by spiritual compromise by those on the inside.

That's how it always works- the way churches dissolve is not from without but within, through cancerous doctrine and carnal living.

We see this in our own day. Sexual sin is rampant, and a growing number of those who claim to be evangelicals have joined liberals in departing from clear biblical teachings. I only have time for one example.

A recent article in World Magazine reported that 1 in 3 evangelicals now support the idea of same sex unions, and 1 in 7 supports the even more radical same sex marriage. Behind that is probably the false idea that God made homosexuals that way so who are we to stand in the way of their happiness.

Those who hold that view are clearly at odds with the Bible. The New Testament joins the Old Testament in calling homosexuality a sin and declaring that no sexually immoral people, including homosexuals and adulterers, will go to Heaven unless they confess those things as sin and in repentance go to Jesus for cleansing.

In our day false teachers are trying to convince their denominations that not only should such things not be called sin any more, but those who practice those deeds should even be church leaders. Those who hold such views must repent!

The church of Jesus Christ needs to care more about what the One with the two edged sword thinks than what false teachers think!

Jesus Himself tells us what He thinks in the next verse!

V. 16 Jesus fights against professing Christians who are unrepentant

I talked to a man one time about a clear truth in the Bible and he said, “Danny, I’m simply not prepared to have that be part of my image of God.” If some of you were honest this morning, you would say what that man said.

Some people have the confused notion that the loving Jesus would never question any behavior of anyone that comes to church.

They got that from warped presentations of Jesus like in Jesus Christ Superstar, where an effeminate Jesus dances around and who’s only teaching seems to be “judge not lest you be judged.”

The false teachers of our day love to talk about Jesus’ love and tolerance, but can not tolerate the zeal Jesus has for Christians to be like a pure bride that rejects idolatry and immorality.

Your understanding of Jesus has to include verse 16: Jesus will fight against professing Christians who don't turn from their idolatry and immorality.

Thankfully, according to verse 16, it's not too late to repent!

"The Lord certainly would not exhort to repentance if it were not because he promises pardon to the penitent!" Cyprian of Carthage, 3rd century martyr

Please understand my heart as a pastor this morning. There is a difference between a hell-bound sinner who rejects God's Word and a heaven-bound saint who acknowledges God's Word yet struggles with sin. Over the years they may both actually commit some of the same sins. But the heaven-bound saint will never excuse their sin. They will agree with God that it was sin, receive Christ's forgiveness and press on to be the "overcomer" they are in Christ!

Even a bad testimony can become a good testimony when we repent!

Perhaps the Holy Spirit of Jesus is using the Word of God right now to cut into your heart. Let the truth just spoken cut you in the right way. Let the Word be the instrument of salvation, not the instrument of judgment.

V. 17 Three things overcomers receive

1. Overcomers receive the hidden manna!

In the Old Testament God provided food called manna for them when they walked in the wilderness.

Hidden manna is the sufficiency of Christ in contrast to the allurements of the world that compromise offers. Manna replaces meat offered to idols.

To those in Pergamum who refused the banquets of the pagan gods, Christ will give the manna of His great banquet when He comes in His Kingdom!

I think this is referring to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb spoken of in Rev 19! In a few moments when we take the Lord's Supper we'll be anticipating that day!

2. Overcomers will receive a white stone

There are many different possibilities for what the white stone is, but all commentators agree that the main point is acceptance by Jesus!

The world had given her a thumbs down, but Christ had given her a thumbs up!

“Judges would determine a verdict by placing in an urn a white and black pebble. If the white one came out, it meant acquittal; thus the white stone coming out would mean assurance that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!”
-Charles Ryrie, Everyman’s Bible Commentary, page 30

I want to give you a white stone now!

3. Overcomers will get a new name from Jesus!

The stone I am giving you now is blank. But the one Jesus will give you will have his special name for you on it!

Christian, not only does God provide for you and accept you, He is your most intimate friend. He sees the potential in you no one else sees!

Jesus knows what’s in your heart, and when you live in first love reality and are more concerned about being faithful than self preservation, Jesus is preparing for you a special white stone with His name for you on it!

Others looked and saw Jacob the conniver, Jesus saw Israel! Others looked and saw Simon who was impulsive and talked to much, Jesus saw Peter the Rock!

Others looked at Danny Campbell and saw Bart Simpson-
Jesus looked at me and saw the future Pastor of Wayne Hills Baptist Church!

Jesus knows you, brothers and sisters! Hold on to His name and your good testimony! Get your manna! Get your white stone! Get your new name!