



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

44 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6NN

Charity No. 1060655

Tel: 020 7328 0869 (Manse)

Email: newlifeplondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.newlifebpc.org.uk

“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

Vol. 13 No. 38

LORD’S DAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2009

The Letter to the Church in Pergamum

*By Chris Donato, Part 4 of 8 “The Seven Letters of Revelation”
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – May 2009*

The late, great American man of letters, John Updike, once wrote, “Sex is like money – only too much is enough.” But modern Americans aren’t the only people who obsess over sex; it has possessed the minds of men for millennia (as various cave paintings make clear).

The same held true for the third church addressed in Saint John’s Apocalypse. Pergamum was like the Washington, D.C., of Asia. It was the seat of Roman government for the province and the centre of the imperial cult. It was the first to erect a temple to the caesar, Augustus (as well as to Zeus and the serpent-god Asclepius). And just like certain sectors in the church today, people in the church at Pergamum had succumbed to idolatry and were obsessed with sex (which often go hand-in-hand).

It’s not all bad, however. John prefaces the risen and reigning Messiah’s letter thus: “The words of him who had the sharp two-edged sword” (Rev 2:12), which refers to Christ’s words of truth that condemn all those who deny truth. There is a war for truth going on in Revelation, and often it’s fought with words, which isn’t surprising, given that the Word leads this battle.

Christ praises the church at Pergamum for its faithfulness – even in the face of the apparently rare incident of physical violence against one Antipas, about whom nothing else is known. He receives the ultimate commendation: “my faithful witness” (vs 13). The same eulogy is used of Jesus Himself in chapter one, verse 5. Perhaps Antipas also died a martyr at the hands of imperialists?

“I know where you dwell,” Christ Jesus says, “where Satan’s throne is” (vs 13). How fitting that the Lord of all would belittle the imperial majesty of Rome in this manner. The Caesar, who dared to accept the accolades of the people who hailed him as soter (saviour), in gratitude for rescuing Rome from internal and external strife, was worshipped in this city. But there is another king, namely, Jesus, and He alone is worthy of the kind of praises that was offered at the temples of Augustus, Trajan, or Hadrian. Thus, “Satan’s throne” stands in direct opposition to the heavenly throne in the great ballet for lordship over this world described throughout Revelation.

This battle continues today, though it’s a bit more subtle; or is it? Do our presidential memorials in D.C. cross the line? Do the adulations we heap upon our leaders cross that same line? Is the faith we place in them to save taking it too far? Surely we know that Jesus is Lord and that they are not. At any rate, thanks be to God that while refusing to worship Caesar in the first century likely meant death, refusing to worship our leaders and their messiah-complexes, at least today, does not. We have relative freedom, even if we use it to obsess over idols and sex, which is where Christ’s third letter now turns.

Continued on Page 2...

In Numbers 25:1-3 and 31:16, Balaam advised King Balak to lure the Israelites into apostasy by enticing them with Moabite women to share pagan sacrificial meals. Jesus warns this church for tolerating those in their midst who have recapitulated Balaam's foolishness – the Nicolaitans (see also 2 Peter 2:15). Balaam's name means "he destroys the people"; Nicolaus means "he conquers the people." That's a pretty blatant parallel.

Apparently, some confused Christians in Pergamum thought that they could participate in the pagan cult meals, which were an important part of social and economic life in those days. The sexual immorality that also was tolerated, if not advocated, in Pergamum may have been metaphorical, as when God's people whored themselves out to idolatry (for example, Jer 3:7-9). But, knowing man, it was probably literal as well.

In contrast to the idolatrous meals, Jesus promises manna, the food of God's future banquet. As in the allusion to Balaam and Balak, the new exodus is never far from view: Christ is leading His people through the wilderness and will protect His remnant along the way with the sword of His mouth (Rev 2:16). Therefore, those who do not compromise themselves with idols and sexual immorality will receive a "white stone," which acknowledges their being a new creation in Christ and admits them into the messianic feast of the kingdom (vs 17).

There's no doubt today that sex itself is a god and that it's not just "out there," either. It's in here – in our churches and in our hearts. If we would have Jesus as Lord over this area of our lives, we must take care not to fall off one side or the other. We must take care to not demean sexual intimacy as if it's not one of God's great gifts to humankind. And, more likely these days, we must also take care not to allow ourselves to become obsessed with sex, to capitulate to our culture's obsession with it, as if everything it demands must be obeyed, which reduces sex to a matter of basic human rights or machismo. We must come to the point of confessing the irony of Updike's words: "Too much is too much."

The Letter to the Church in Thyatira

*By Dr. R. Fowler White, Part 5 of 8 "The Seven Letters of Revelation"
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – May 2009*

In the opening pages of Revelation, our Lord introduces Himself as heaven's holy warrior (1:12-20) who would prepare His people to overcome their enemies (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) by exhorting them to hear what the Spirit has to say in the letters He writes to seven churches. Strikingly, though He writes each letter to a particular church, Christ insists that each be heard by all (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), effectively making each one an "open letter" for all believers to read. What, then, does Christ want us to learn from His letter to the church at Thyatira? To hear that lesson we have to examine key particulars of the letter that Christ wrote to the Christians there.

Most importantly, Christ's message to the Christians at Thyatira is a warning that they are in grave spiritual danger. But how can this be? This church, unlike the one at Ephesus, has not lost its first love (2:4-5) but has frown in love and faith with service and endurance (2:19). Surely, they are secure. However, with those virtues, a vice cohabits. In other words, the risk is not coming from outside the church: just as it was at Laodicea, persecution by imperial Rome poses no threat to Thyatira's wellbeing. Instead, the danger is coming from within. The church is tolerating the presence of a false prophetess and her disciples (2:20). Indeed, the influence of this bad tree and its bad fruit (Matt 7:15-20) is compromising Thyatira's professed betrothal to Christ (see 2 Cor 11:2-3). We understand better the threat posed by these wolves when we analyse the background of Thyatira.

Continued on Page 3...

Though by worldly standards Thyatira was the least known of Revelation's seven cities, it was distinctive for the large number of trade guilds (related especially to textiles and armour) that prospered there. The influence of these unions on civic life was considerable. Roughly every month they sponsored common meals for their members, feasts that involved worship of the Roman emperor with local patron deities and, frequently, sexual immorality. Not to accommodate oneself to these pagan practices placed one at significant economic risk, particularly if one wanted to get ahead in business and society.

It would have been one thing at Thyatira for Christians in the trades (such as Lydia, Acts 16:14) to be invited to these feasts by coworkers outside the church; it would have been another thing for a leader in the church to approve of Christians accepting those invitations. Imagine these tempting words: "You know the 'deep things' (Rev 2:24) at work here. You know that 'idols are nothing' (1 Cor 8:4); you know that 'all things are lawful' for you (6:12). So, go to the feast, eat, drink, and be merry! You have to make a living, don't you?" No wonder the Lord of the church called the false prophetess at Thyatira by the derogatory moniker "Jezebel." In Israel, that Gentile queen of evil King Ahab had persecuted God's prophets and promoted the typically sexually unrestrained worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:4; 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22)/ The parallels between Israel and Thyatira are obvious.

The idolatry and immorality at Thyatira, however, expose even more about the false prophetess and her disciples. If Jezebel of Thyatira isn't the model for John's portrait of Madam Babylon in Revelation 17, she is at least a local embodiment of all that that prostitute stood for. Like a daughter emulating her mother, Jezebel's enticement echoes Babylon's denials of the one, true God and His righteousness, denials incarnated in the social systems of the present evil age. Like Babylon, Jezebel makes her children-followers complicit in the harlotries of this world, body and soul. And at the heart of those harlotries is the lure of economic security. To follow Jezebel, then, is to share earthly Babylon's identity; to renounce her is to share heavenly Jerusalem's identity.

But Christ would give us still more insight into the choice before Thyatira and before us. With a wisdom surpassing Solomon's, He would have the churches discern their destiny from their likeness to their spiritual mother. Those He identifies as the unrepentant prophetess and her children He will punish with suffering and death in this age (Rev 2:22-23); those He identifies as His repentant and steadfast people (vs 24-25) He will reward with a share of royal authority to crush their enemies at the end of this age (vs 26-28). The lesson for Thyatira and for us is plain: to share a mother's identity is to share her destiny.

Do we have ears to hear Christ's message to Thyatira? Has the lure of economic security led our churches to tolerate false teaching? Our Protestant forebears saw their church turn into a harlot liable to Christ's judgement. So they renounced Jezebel; the "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also," and the Reformation followed. Let us also repent of our promiscuous desire for economic security in this Babylonian world and end our affairs with teachers who would tempt us away from the holy safety of Jerusalem above and the world to come.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am** and **4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 20/09/2009	Next Week: 27/09/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Elizabeth Knowes to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Travelogue to Sardis	Travelogue to Philadelphia	
<i>Text:</i>	Revelations 3:1-6	Revelations 3:7-13	
<i>Organist:</i>	Grace	Anthony	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	John Poh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Thank God for the prompt approval of Pastor and Mrs Ki's visa application. Pray for them as they prepare to return to London. • DHW Bible Study: Today, we will cover Lesson 18 (Gen 25). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 19 (Gen 26). • Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony: This Friday, SGAT will hold their monthly meeting. • Pray for those who are sick: - Yetta's mum (recovery from cancer), Constance (ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid and skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (Asthma, Hay fever), Brian (wisdom tooth extraction - upcoming check-up), Mrs Ki's father (lung cancer), John (ankle, wisdom tooth extraction - appointment) • Pray for those who are on travel: Sophia (S'pore), Lee-Wei (S'pore), Nicolas (Belgium), Hubert (Europe), Rev & Mrs Ki (Australia), Daniel & Maureen (M'sia/Japan) • Pray for those progressing with their studies: Yetta, Joshua, Grace • Pray for visa applications: Joshua (Student visa). Thank God for the approval of Joy's post study visa. • Parking restriction in zone KQ: The restriction is still in effect. It will be lifted next week.
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Search Me	Despair and Hope	
<i>Text:</i>	Psalms 139	Isaiah 9:2-7	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Joy	
Other Duties			
	Today: 20/09/2009	Next Week: 27/09/2009	
<i>Ushers:</i>	Daniel / Evelyn	Joey / Sharon	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Volunteers	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Joshua	Jonathan	
<i>DHW Class:</i>	Lesson 18 (Gen 25)	Lesson 19 (Gen 26)	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 25 Sept	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Combined meeting with SGAT	
Sat 26 Sept	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Jonathan	
<u>Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering:	£458.60	Lunch: £34.00	
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>Serving Christ for Himself</u></h2> <p style="margin: 0;"><i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i></p> <p style="margin: 0;">We are ready for usefulness just in the measure in which we have learned the lesson of self-forgetfulness. Self stands in the way of many glorious possibilities of good. Men drag their own personality into the cause they are serving. They stickle for honour and place, and demand recognition, appreciation, and reward. Appreciation and gratitude are very sweet. Who does not love to receive words of commendation? But if such words do not come — if, instead, wrong and injustice come — our zeal for Christ should be no less intense. Let us so sink ourselves in the cause of Christ that our loyalty, devotion, and fidelity shall in no way be affected either by honour or neglect, by praise or blame.</p>			