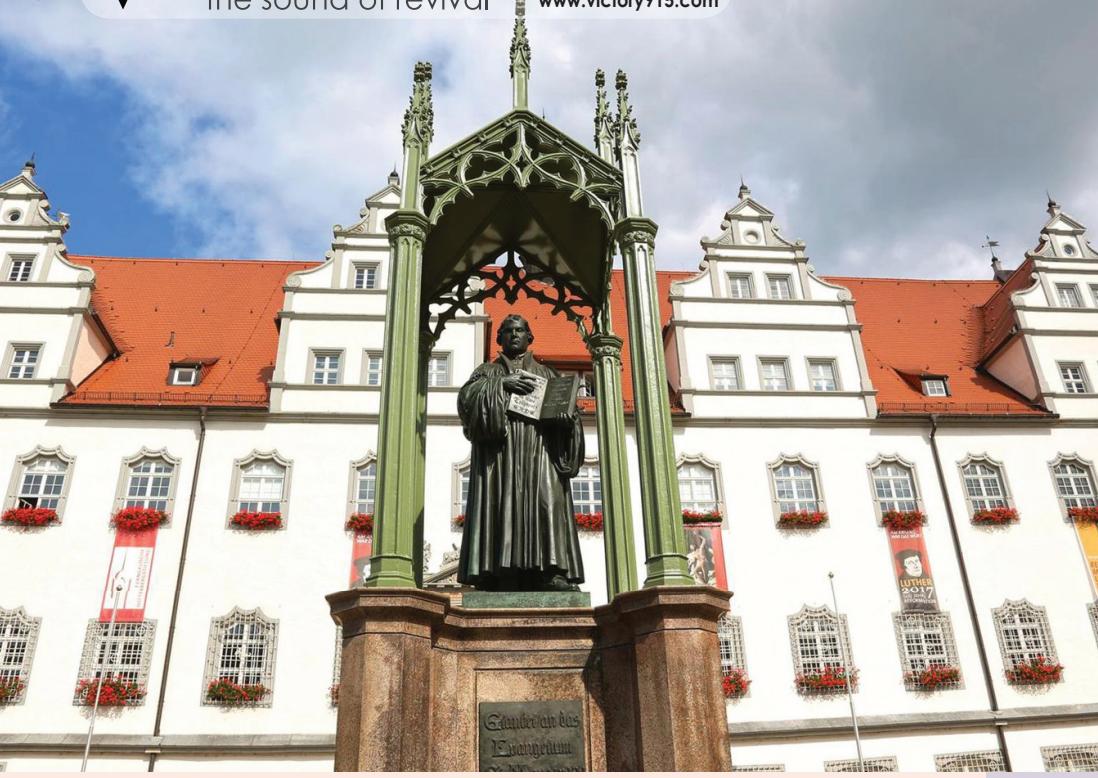


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### Making Pergamos Great Again by Ray Haynes

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: '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.'" Revelation 2:12-13

America is known abroad as the Land of Opportunities. It hasn't felt that way for some time, so the thought of a new President with a passion to make it "great" again is beyond political, it's inspiring. The ancient city of Pergamos, which means "elevated", was raised up to greatness in a similar way. Christianity went from the most persecuted religion to become the state religion of the Roman Empire virtually overnight. Suddenly only Christians could hold government positions, and they were favored as merchants and as landowners. But with the elevation, there came a huge influx of evil that the church failed to discern or properly resist. As America sits at the beginning of 2017 (Biblical year 5777), there are some important lessons we need to take from the church at Pergamos as we position ourselves for favor in the coming days.

Jesus introduced Himself to the church at Pergamos as the One "with the two-edged sword". In Hebrew, the pictograph for the number 7 is a sword, which makes 77 a double edged broad sword, and 777 a picture of God holding the sword. As we discussed at length during the Fall Feasts, the numbers 5777 are very significant. It is a year when God's Kingdom should be more visible on the earth and more effective at bringing change. **Hebrews 4:12** says, "For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a diserner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Notice that the sword of God's Word is the most powerful weapon anywhere, but only when it is used. If the church becomes complacent as Pergamos did, we will enjoy favor but not lasting victory. This sword is about truth, and standing for the truth is always costly. The great temple of the false god Serapis stood in Pergamos. It was here, in the year 92, that Saint Antipas, the first Bishop of Pergamos, was burned alive inside a Brazen Bull incense burner by an angry mob. Pergamos also had an altar to Baal that was literally called "Satan's Throne." This altar was used most often for sacrificing children. Abortion in America is no less a throne, and Jesus is now coming near with "the sharp two-edged sword".

The name Antipas, lived on long after the martyr. The name, which means "anti-pope" or "anti-father," became a movement that rose up after Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Their "antipas" rally cry fought to keep Jesus as the only Head of the Church, and to resist the exceptional power given to the Bishops by the Emperor. Eventually, the Reformers took up their mantle to overcome "the abomination that desolated" the church. Placing false "fathers" in absolute spiritual authority separated the people from their direct relationship to the Lord by putting men in His place. They forbid the reading of the Scriptures by the common man, at penalty of death. What Jesus revealed to babes now was hidden to all. Doctrine was no longer ruled by Scripture but by the pride of man.

Poignantly, 2017 is the 500-year anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenburg Cathedral to launch the Protestant Reformation, and light the way out of the Dark Ages. **"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balaam to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."** Revelation 2:14-16

We cannot deny that Satan has found a home in America, and has raised up those who hold to much worse doctrines than Balaam. In recent years they have changed laws and demanded the righteous to live unrighteously, hoping for our Godly protection to be compromised. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans brought prostitution into the church in Pergamos; the LGBT movement in America has labored long and effectively to compromise the very fabric and walls of marriage. The very name of Nicolas means "destroyer of the people". Our court system should bring justice, but instead it has been hijacked by this Godless influence. We must pray and battle until righteous judges are raised up again.

Before the Antichrist, or man of sin, is raised up, the sin of man will exalt itself in the church and in the world. If we think we can overcome sin without the "the sword of His mouth" going before us, we will be victims not victors. We must not despise suffering or the testing of our faith. We must cry out for grace continually and walk humbly with our God. The church is the Lord's virgin bride; we must be chaste, as well as influential. We must be salt and light, but we can still be as impactful as Daniel and Joseph, who used political power to advance the Kingdom of God. **Charles Colson noted, "It is a huge mistake to become married to an ideology, because the greatest enemy of the gospel is ideology. Ideology is a man-made format of how the world ought to work, and Christians instead believed in the revealing truth Scripture."**

Colson, once known as President Nixon's "hatchet man", founded Prison Fellowship after the Watergate scandal. What did he learn from his fall from life in the White House? **Jeremiah 17:9 became his safeguard, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"** He never trusted his own heart or mind again. He surrounded himself with men who would always tell him the truth; men who knew how to live with a sword coming out of their mouth. I can't wait for some righteousness to return to America, but if Pergamos is our lesson, far more happened there that corrupted the church than was done to elevate the government to a place of godliness.

The only true success for a Christian is their devotion to the Great Commission. Over the last hundred years Americans planted churches on every continent. The hope to disciple nations is a perfect reason to seek power in government. **Isaiah 40:3 prophesies that we should be, "A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."** The spirit of the world is wooing everyone, so the voice of the Lord must be the loudest place in our lives. We must pray for our new leaders, "God You are our help; the One who sustains our nation and our leaders. Give us and our leaders a hunger for your Word. God you established America for your purposes and Your glory; empower and direct our leaders to walk in Your ways. Keep them also from willful sins; may they not rule over them. God you are the hope of the whole earth. We put our trust in You."

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