

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #7
Revelation 2:12-17
8/9 /2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Pergamos

Christ's third letter was addressed to the Church at Pergamos, the compromised church that failed to hold out the pagan culture that surrounded it and compromised its very internal nature as a result. It represents the time period of the church from 314 AD to 590 AD and is the period when the world entered the church and the church began to move away from a focus on Christ. Dr. J. Vernon McGee refers to the period as *paganism unlimited* and others refer to it as the time of great compromise.

While the cities of Ephesus and Smyrna were located on the seacoast and were great commercial cities. The city of Pergamos was located inland on a high mountain which was topped with the Acropolis accompanied by many pagan temples because it was a religious center. It was a sophisticated city with a large university and library of 200,000 handwritten volumes. In fact, the city got its name from the parchment (pergamia) which was used for the books. Pergamos also had a well-known healing center which we shall elaborate on more in later paragraphs.

Revelation 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

Revelation 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Revelation 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Revelation 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

CHRIST'S SALUTATION

As He addressed "*the angel*," the pastor, of the church, Jesus referred to Himself as "**he which hath the sharp sword with two edges**" because He was going to cut through all of their religious trappings and expose their compromises and hypocrisy. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "*the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" Christ would use that sword to separate the false from the true and real.

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CHRIST'S COMMENDATION

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”

Jesus commends this church for three very specific things.

First, He takes note of their circumstances. Even with its weaknesses, Jesus noted its presence in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

“Even where Satan’s seat is” referred to the presence of a number of pagan temples and the worship of various idols. It was the location of Satan’s throne because he had been able to lead the citizens into worshipping so many false gods.

Entering the city the first temple seen is the imposing temple of **Athena** directly below the great library. One would also see the great temple of **Caesar Augustus** and **Hadrian’s** great temple. There is the great altar to **Zeus** with an idol on it near the palace of the king.

Another impressive area is the temple of **Dionysius**, or **Bacchus**, the god of wine, also known as the goat-god. He was depicted with horns and with the upper part of his body resembling a man and the lower part a goat, with cloven feet and a tail, which was very similar to the modern depiction of Satan.

The other outstanding temple was to the god **Asklepios**, the god of healing. If you were looking at a Greek idol of Asklepios you would see a man. If you were looking at an Oriental idol of **Asklepios** you would see a serpent. In Pergamos it was a serpent. The temple was round and contained various areas of healing. They used both medicine and psychology. The temple had long tunnels with holes in the top that looked like holes for ventilation, but they were for another purpose. As one walked down these long tunnels and passed a place where one of the holes was located, he would hear a sexy voice saying to him, “You are going to feel better. You are going to be healed.”

The tunnels led to a sauna area where the patient got into a hot bath and then had a massage. If you weren’t healed by that time, you went into an area where nonpoisonous snakes crawled over your body.

All of this was a mixture of psychology and magic and practiced with Satanic influence.

Second, **“thou holdest fast my name”** referred to the courage of some of the leaders of the church in their effort to stand up for the name of Christ. As mentioned above, the church at Pergamos represented the period from 314 AD to 590 AD, an age that produced some giants of the faith. When the **Arian heresy** arose (which denied the deity of Jesus), **Athanasius** from North Africa was the great defender of the faith and, because of him, the **Council of Nicea** in AD 325 condemned **Arianism**. Another giant of the faith was **Augustine**, who responded to the Pelagian heresy which denied original sin, the total corruption of the flesh as well as irresistible grace.

Third, **“thou holdest fast my name”** referred to the true body of doctrine which was believed by those Christians who were steadfast in the faith. **“Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr”** refers to a martyred saint about whom we know nothing, but was possibly the first martyr at Pergamos.

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CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION

Christ had two words of condemnation for the church at Pergamos. **“But I have a few things against thee...”** and both of these had to do with *the failure to resist the encroachment of paganism into the life of the church*. The condemnation would have been true of the church at Pergamos, the age it represented and, to some degree, the church down through the ages.

First:

“because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

“The doctrine of Balaam” is different from the *error* of Balaam (Jude 11) which was the idea that God would curse Israel because they were sinners. It is also different from the *way* of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15) which was covetousness.

The experience to which this refers is found in Numbers 22-25. Balak, a king of the Moabites, tried to hire the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam took his money, but failed in his attempt to curse the Israelites. However, he did give Balak advice as to how to bring a curse upon the Israelites. He taught Balak to corrupt the Israelites by seducing them to intermarry with the Moabite women and thereby introducing them to the worship of pagan gods. This introduced into the Israelites' culture both idolatry and fornication. Likewise, during the time period represented by the church at Pergamos the unconverted world became accepted into the church. Thus, **“the doctrine of Balaam” is the doctrine of compromise with the pagan culture around it and the adoption of its practices and ways which resulted in a blurring of the distinctions between Israel (Christianity) and its pagan neighbors**. It also refers to an attitude of accepting some of the pagan ways in order to be accepted and approved by those of the pagan culture. This attitude of compromise and accommodation seems to have prepared the way for the next thing that the Lord condemns.

Second:

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” was a reference to a heresy led by a man named Nicolas in which the pagan practices of promiscuity were allowed in, tolerated, and actually made a part of the activities of the early church. With few exceptions, pagan worship always incorporates various forms and practices of sexual activity, usually involving promiscuity and fornication. Once the church began to compromise with the pagan culture surrounding it, it was almost inevitable that it would also adopt its attitude toward sex and its accompanying sins.

God is clear. He hates such things and condemns them.

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CHRIST'S WARNING

“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Sin, terrible sin, was present, and when sin is present there is only one response: “Repentance.” The compromise of the church in which they, who professed to serve God, had instead attempted to please the world around them, had led them into deep sin. God’s solution is always the same. The first step involves repentance. Without genuine, heart-breaking, mind-turning repentance there can be no healing. The prompter for repentance is always the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit always uses the powerful Word of God, the holy, pure truth of God to both reveal sin and to lead the sinner to salvation. It was God’s truth then and it is God’s truth today.

CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENT AND PROMISE

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” God speaks to us. If we will, we can hear and obey what He tells us to do and find His healing from our disease of sin and its consequences.

“To him that overcometh” is God’s definition of a genuine Christian. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb. We can never, ourselves, be overcomers, but we can overcome anything by the blood of the slain Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

“The hidden manna” speaks of the person and death of Christ as He is revealed in the Word of God.

“And will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” refers to a custom practiced among the people of that day when a person gave a cube or rectangular block of stone to an intimate friend. On that block would be some secret writing of a very important message including a unique name that no one else knew.