

Christ's Messages To The Seven Churches Of Asia;

Part 2—The Message To Pergamum

(Revelation 2:12-17)

Scripture: 12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 ‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 15 ‘Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 ‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

Intro: This morning we continue our study of the messages Christ delivered to the seven churches of Asia, recorded in chapters two and three. We noted last week that the believers in the church at Ephesus had left their first love (2:1-7). Christ exhorted them to remember, to repent, and to return to serving Him as they had done at the first (2:5). Christ praised the believers in the church at Smyrna for exhibiting faithfulness in the face of intense persecution, and promised to reward them with the crown of life (2:8-11). Christ’s next message is addressed to the believers in the church at Pergamum (2:12-17).

We need to keep in mind that Christ’s messages to these seven churches had direct application to believers in actual churches in John’s day. But they also represent the chronological development or various successive periods of church history from the Day of Pentecost to the second coming of Christ. For example: Ephesus represents the infant church of the Apostolic age, while Laodicea represents the Apostate church of the Tribulation period. Lastly,

these letters are important to us because they provide personal applications to our lives as well.

Though each message is different, Jesus' admonition to each of the seven churches follows the same general six-fold outline:

C. Message to the Church in Pergamum: *A Compromising Church* (2:12-17)

1. Destination of the letter (2:12a)

Christ's third message is addressed to the church in **Pergamum** or Pergamos. It is located about 45 miles north from Smyrna. **MAP** Pergamum had been the capital of Asia for nearly 400 hundred years, and was considered its greatest city. The city was acclaimed a great cultural center for its university and a library containing two hundred thousand volumes. It was here that parchment was first manufactured and used. Pergamum was the center of emperor worship, and the first city in Asia to erect a temple in honor of Caesar Augustus. **Slides**

The name Pergamum is derived from two words meaning "elevation" and "marriage." It depicts the time when church and state were united under Constantine in A.D. 313. This union resulted in the churches being married to the world, and elevated to a place of power. This worldly union resulted in compromise in morals and false teachings.

2. Description of Christ (2:12b)

Christ is depicted as *the One who has the sharp two-edged sword*. This picture is drawn from John's vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1, where He was depicted as having a two-edged sword projecting from His mouth (1:12-16). The two-edged sword symbolizes the Word of God. In Hebrews 4:12 it is described as a tool that is able to penetrate the inmost recesses of a person's soul and spirit—God's Word judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart (cf. Eph. 6:17).

3. Commendation (2:13)

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

As in the two preceding letters, Christ begins with words of commendation. He assures these believers that He was aware of the difficulties they faced dwelling where Satan's throne was located. Christ praises them for remaining steadfast in standing up for His name, and for not denying the faith when His faithful witness Antipas was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ.

As we learned last Wednesday night, the heathenism, idolatry, and Satanic worship developed by Nimrod's wife Semiramis at the Tower of Babel moved from ancient Babylon to Pergamum after the Persians took over Babylon in 539 B.C. Pergamum had many temples devoted to various pagan cults: Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Esculapius. It housed one of the ancient wonders of the world, a magnificent altar dedicated to Zeus.

The commendation for holding fast Christ's name has further reference to the theological battle that was raging at this time. I am referring to the Arian controversy that denied the eternal nature of Christ. Arianism was a Christian heresy that began in the fourth century. It takes its name from its founder, Arius, a Presbyter in the church at Alexandria, Egypt. Arius posited that Christ was not eternal God, but the greatest of all beings that ever emanated from God. His opponents, led by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria and a defender of Trinitarianism, maintained that Christ was one with the Father, existing in one eternal trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: One God in three Persons.

The Emperor Constantine convened a church council at the city of Nicea to resolve the controversy. The question to be answered was what did the apostles teach? Was Jesus Christ truly God, Athanasius' view, or was he merely the greatest being God had ever created, Arius' view? Over three hundred bishops were in attendance, and Constantine, sitting on a golden throne, presided over the affair as Pontifex Maximus, meaning: *the High Priest who spans the bridge between mortals and Satan*.

A brilliant Arian theologian presented Arius' view that Jesus Christ was not eternal God, but the greatest of all beings created by God. Athanasius condemned this view as heresy, and argued that Jesus Christ was truly God. The young Arian theologian argued so persuasively that he nearly won over the bishops. At this point an elderly hermit from the deserts of Africa sprang to his feet, clothed in nothing more than a tiger's skin. He

tore the tiger's skin from his back, exposing a body riddled by scars. His scars were the result of having been thrown into the arena to be torn by wild beasts. The elderly hermit cried, "These scars are the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I cannot hear any more of this blasphemy. He then proceeded to present so stirring a biblical-based defense of Christ's eternal deity, that the majority in attendance realized that he was speaking by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit.

The bishops attending the council at Nicea adopted the following confession supporting Christ's eternal deity:

"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father"

While the Christians at Pergamum had remained true to Christ under severe testing, they had none-the-less compromised their testimony as seen in the next two verses, 14 and 15

4. Condemnation (2:14-15)

14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Christ condemns these believers for allowing some of their members to compromise in the areas of morals and teachings. Some of them were holding to the teaching of Balaam and others to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Balaam you recall was a soothsayer/prophet hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to come to Moab in order to pronounce a curse against the people of Israel (Num. 22–24). God turned each of Balaam's curses into blessings. Frustrated by his inability to collect the monies he had been promised, Balaam counseled Balak to entice the Israelites to compromise through immorality and idolatry. He advised Balak to send young Moabite women to invite the people to the sacrifices of their gods. We read in Numbers 25:2—"And the people ate and bowed down to their gods, and committed sexual fornication with the daughters of Moab.

God struck the sons of Israel with a plague and 24,000 died (v. 9).

Believers in Pergamum were compromising by intermarrying heathen women, which inevitably led to the worship of idols. They were also condemned for embracing the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans, you will recall from our previous study (2:6), were a sect that promoted license and freedom, especially in the area of morality.

Others suggest that Christ was condemning the establishment of a priestly hierarchy that subjugated the laity. This was certainly the result of Emperor Constantine's uniting the church and state in A.D. 313. This unholy union resulted in compromise in morals and false teachings.

5. Counsel (2:16)

16 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

As in His previous letters, Christ rebuked these believers, and advised them to repent. If they refused to repent, He would be forced to come in judgment. Christ's standard of judgment is always His unchanging Word.

Compromise with the world has always been one of the gravest ills of mankind. The children of Israel repeatedly compromised with their Pagan neighbors, and suffered God's judgment. Christians have likewise tended toward compromise with the world since the days of Pergamos. As believers today we need to heed Christ's call to holiness, which means separation from sin and worldliness.

6. Promise (2:17)

17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

The believer who is willing to hear the Spirit's admonition to repent, is promised the *hidden manna* Christ provides. Just as the children of Israel were sustained with *manna* throughout their 40 years of wilderness

wanderings, so too Christ's *manna* provides satisfaction and blessing to every believer who walks in fellowship with Him.

The white stone Christ promises to His followers could be symbolic of the white stones used in ancient court proceedings to signify a not guilty verdict. As Paul states in Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The important point is the inscription on the stone provides each believer "a new name," which is indicative of our acceptance by God both in life and in death.

Conclusion:

Christ commended the believers in the church at Pergamum for upholding Him as the eternal Son of God, but condemned them for compromising with the world and false teachers of their day.

Applications:

1. Is there any area in your life where you are compromising?
2. May we remain true to Christ in spite of the obvious advances Satan appears to be making into our culture.
3. I pray that each of us may discover satisfaction and joy in knowing and serving Jesus Christ our Lord!

Join me in a word of prayer, and then we will have the men come forward to collect and distribute the elements for communion.

Lord's Table: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29