

6. The Message to the Church at Pergamos

In our last topic, we saw that we want to prepare our physical and spiritual children for tribulation and persecution. We want to help them learn to be faithful until death even if it means dying for their faith in Christ. In this topic, we will see that Christ gave John a message to write to the church at Pergamos.

In Revelation 2:12-13, we read, “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.’” Instead, we see Christ pictured as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword. This means that we are going to see that Christ judges certain things in this church. We also see that Christ knew the works of this church and what the church had to deal with at that time because of what was located at Pergamos. The fact that the Lord knew their works shows that they worked hard to serve the Lord.

We also see that Christ said that Pergamos was the place where the throne of Satan was located. In Pergamos, there was a large throne-shaped altar to the Greek god Zeus. There were also other Greek gods closely associated with this city. 1 Corinthians 10:20 says, “Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.” Here, we see that the worship of demons is really a worship of Satan. The fact that Christ described this as the place where Satan’s throne is makes it clear that at any given time Satan has to have a place from which to center his activities because Satan can only be at one place at a time. This meant that the Christians in that city faced much opposition.

Christ also said that the church at Pergamos held fast to His name. The word translated “hold fast to” means *to have power or to hold*. Hebrews 4:14 says, “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.” Just as we are to hold fast our confession about Christ, the Christians were holding fast to the name of Christ. They were not turning away from the Lord in spite of the great opposition which they regularly faced from Satan.

The faith of these Christians was certainly put to the test when Antipas was put to death for his testimony about Christ. We see that he had been a faithful martyr who had been put to death for his faithful witness about Christ. Even though the other Christians also realized that their lives were in danger, they did not deny their faith and the fact that they were followers of Christ. Paul wrote, in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.” Here, we see that Paul was ready to die for his testimony about Christ. By the time that John wrote this book Christians in many different places had also been put to death for their faith in Christ. The Christians in Pergamos were willing to stand fast in their faith even though they knew that their lives were in danger as a result of the fact that their city was the center for the activity of Satan.

We go on to read, in Revelation 2:14-16, about the things that Christ had against the church in

Pergamos even though they had stood firm in their faith in Christ. This church had people who held to the doctrine of Balaam who taught two ways for Balaam to put a stumbling block in front of Israel to get them to turn away from the Lord and turn to sin. First, Balaam told Balak to get the people of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols. Numbers 25:2-3 says, “They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.” Instead, we see that part of the people of Israel ate the sacrifices that were offered to the idols. Then, they bowed down and began to worship those idols. Balaam knew that God would judge Israel if the people turned and started worshiping idols.

Second, Numbers 25:1 says, “Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.” Then, Numbers 25:6-8 says, “And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel.” Here, we see that Balaam had suggested that Moab and Midian encourage the people of Israel to commit immorality with them so that God would judge the people of Israel. We see that as a result of this sin that twenty-four thousand people of Israel died so many people of Israel got involved in both idol worship and immorality.

The church at Pergamos also had people in the church who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We saw in the letter to the church at Ephesus that the word “Nicolaitans” comes from two Greek words. “Nikao” means *to conquer*. “Laos” means *the people*. This is also the word from which we get the word “laity”. We also saw that Nicolas led many people astray into immorality and other evil actions. Here, we see that, in the church at Pergamos, there were people who had these doctrines of the Nicolaitans and were trying to control the people and lead them into immorality and other evil actions. Today, we also have many false spiritual leaders who do these same things to satisfy their own evil desires and lead people astray.

Christ said that He hated the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and said He would judge those who taught this doctrine. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” These verses point out that God will not be mocked. The Nicolaitans and all those who follow their evil actions will one day reap the consequences for their actions if there is no true repentance in their lives.

That is why Christ told the Nicolaitans to repent. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, we read, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” An idol is anything that is more important to a person than God. True repentance means that a person turns from that thing and comes to God through Christ. All who come in true repentance have a desire to serve Christ. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says,

“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” The sorrow of this world is sorrow by a person that was caught in his sin. Such a person is sorry that he got caught instead of having sorrow for the sin. In contrast, true repentance causes a person to have sorrow for the sin. Such sorrow causes the person to come to God in repentance and leads to forgiveness.

Christ said that if there was no repentance that He would come quickly and fight against the Nicolaitans with the sword of His mouth. The sword of Christ’s mouth is the Word that goes out of His mouth. 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 discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Here, we are reminded of the fact that Christ and the Word both expose the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Christ then gave a promise to all those who are overcomers (Christians). Revelation 2:17 says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*.” This verse reminds us of the importance of really listening to the lessons that the Holy Spirit is trying to teach to the churches since they are also for all Christians. In this verse, we see that the Lord has two promises for those who really listen to what the Holy Spirit is teaching. First, the Lord promises to give us some of the hidden manna to eat. In the Old Testament, the Jews were given manna to eat for the forty years that they were in the wilderness. In contrast, John 6:51 says, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” In this verse, we see that Christ is the living bread that comes down from heaven.

Second, the Lord promises to give us a white stone. In the Olympics, and other games in that period, a white stone was given to each one that won a race. That stone gave them the right to enter into the victory celebration for all winners. Luke 10:20 says, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” The fact that our names are written in heaven means that we have the right to enter into the eternal victory celebration in heaven. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the greatness of these two blessings that we have as Christians. At the same time, we also want to help our children learn to understand and explain the doctrine of the Nicolaitans so that they can warn others not to be deceived by that doctrine. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things to others.