

Christ's Letter to the Church at Pergamum

The Church of Pergamum

- Pergamum was located 70 miles north of Smyrna
- It was an imposing city of strength, with a citadel that stood 1300 feet above the river plain
- It held a temple to Athena and an altar to Zeus
- It became an intellectual center of the Roman Empire because of its large Library
- It was also a religious center, promoting both the Greek deities and the imperial cult
- Christians were persecuted for their refusal to engage in Emperor worship

The Powerful Sword of Christ

- Christ draws attention to His possession of the two-edged sword
 - Christ is pictured as standing over this church with the sword
 - This is done to show that Christ will bring justice to this church
 - This would be an encouragement to those rightly suffering for Christ
 - It would also stand as a warning for those who had departed from the faith
- He does so in speaking of His words
 - The key is understanding that justice is determined by the Word of Christ
 - Those who live in fidelity to Christ's Word will be vindicated
 - Those who reject Christ's word will be judged

Living in Enemy Territory

- Christ again comforts this church by speaking of His knowledge of their situation.
- Their homes were in the shadow of Satan's throne
 - The concept here is that there is a strong, Satanic presence in this city
 - In some way, Pergamum is considered by Christ as the seat of Satanic Power
 - As a city, Pergamum was bathed in Satanic devices
 - The Acropolis of the city, when viewed from a distance looked like a throne
 - There were numerous altars, shrines, and temples in Pergamum along with a wholesale acceptance of paganism.
 - The Altar to Zeus in the city was imposing and dominated the city, which included images of serpents
 - The Cult of Asklepios was based in Pergamum whose symbol was a snake
 - Under Domitian, those who refused to worship the emperor were persecuted and killed
 - Pergamum stands as a city which testifies to the grandeur and power of Satan
 - Yet Christ is here pictured as greater

- These believers held fast to Christ’s name despite the raging of Satan around them.
 - They clenched Christ’s name tightly in the midst of difficulty
 - They did not renounce the faith
 - Even as they watched loved ones die, they still held to Christ.
 - Antipas stands as an example to us
 - He is said to be a faithful witness
 - Faithful to Christ
 - Faithful to the gospel message
 - Faithful to the end

The Need for Constant Vigilance

- While this church stood, at great sacrifice, for Christ, they were beginning to be carried away with other doctrines.
- The teaching of Balaam had begun to corrupt this church.
 - Balaam was a Gentile “prophet” who the King of Moab sought to use against Israel
 - God showed himself more powerful, though, for when Balaam sought to curse Israel, he only ended up blessing them.
 - However, through his influence, Israel would fall away into idolatry and immorality (Num. 25:1-3; 31:16)
 - Just as Balaam “taught” Israel to fall into idolatry and immorality, so new teachings, likely of the Nicolaitans, were leading God’s people astray in the same way.
- It is often when the church is weakened, that Satan will attack on another front.
- But when we are at our weakest, God is at His strongest.
- Christ implores one response: repentance.
- Christ warns of the consequence of not repenting: judgment.
 - Judgment would come in Him “coming to them.”
 - Those who claimed to be the people of God, by following errant doctrine, showed that they are truly enemies
 - Christ would judge them with war made by the sword of His mouth (Rev. 19:11 & 15)
 - Balaam was also judged by the sword (Num. 22:23, 31; 31:8)
 - Christ is clear that he will judge those who teach and those who follow wrong doctrine!

The Hidden Manna

- In the Old Testament, manna was given by God as food to sustain his people in the wilderness.
- The hidden manna may be a reference to the coming kingdom in the end times.
- The hidden manna may be a reference to the bread that is consumed in the celebration of the Lord’s supper. (I Cor. 10:3-4)
- The Hidden Manna may be mentioned to contrast eating food offered to idols.
- The hidden manna may refer to Christ, as the bread of life. (John 6:35)

- It is likely that most if not all of these views presented are in view
 - Believers are currently living in the Messianic end times, seated with Christ in heaven, and, therefore, are partakers of the bread of life.
 - We are reminded of the body and blood of Christ that were given and of which we partake and gain eternal life.
 - Christ's eternal provision is of far greater value than the sustenance of this world.
- The reality is that the overcomers, which refer to all believers, are defined by gaining their spiritual sustenance in Christ alone.

The White Stone

- In Jewish and Roman cultures, the giving of a stone has several overtones
- The white stone could refer to a stone of innocence.
- The white stone could refer to a ticket for admission
- The white stone could refer to a stone that marks freedom
- It is likely that elements of all of these options are in view
 - The believer is declared innocent of their sins and righteous in Christ
 - The believer is granted admission into Christ's everlasting kingdom
 - The believer is freed from sin
 - The believer's salvation is recorded by having a new name carved in stone (Isaiah 62:2; 65:15)
- Christ provides full, complete and eternal sustenance and through Him we have a sure hope salvation that rests on Christ's righteousness given to us through faith in Him!