

Sermon Mark S. Aites
SERIES ON THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA
#3: THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

TEXT: REV. 2:12-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. In this lesson we look at our 3rd in our series on the 7 churches of Asia.
 - 1) Previously we have looked at two of them: the church at Ephesus and at Smyrna.
 - 2) Both offered lessons of importance: of keeping our first love, and remaining faithful until death.
2. Pergamos was located about 30 miles north of Smyrna; some 15 miles in from the sea on a high mountain over the Caicus River.
3. It was the great city of Mysia, noted for its wealth and fashion.
4. Like Ephesus and Smyrna, it too was a headquarters for emperor worship.
5. In fact, Summers in his background work notes: "It was the chief city of the province, and here was located the "concilia" which had in charge the matters of state religion and incense offering before the image of the emperor."
6. He further notes: "The city had always been loyal to Rome, so it was only natural that they would be unrelenting in their persecution of the Christians."
7. Pergamos was also a known educational and cultural center.
 - 1) The city library was said at one time to have had some 200,000 volumes on hand.
 - 2) Mark Antony reportedly gave the entire library to Cleopatra for the Alexandria library.
8. The city was also known for its many temples:
 - 1) One to Athene
 - 2) An altar to Zeus
 - 3) And most notably, it was the worship center of Asclepius, god of healing (emblem--serpent).
9. It is generally regarded that the church in this community was established during Paul's long stay in Ephesus.
10. Of interest, the introduction in this letter to this congregation is different:

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

 1. The Lord possesses the sharp two-edged sword which is the word of God (**Eph. 6:17**).
 2. **Heb. 4:12** *"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."*
 3. Earlier in this book, John gave a description of Christ: **1:16** *"He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."*
 4. It is possible that *the two-edged sword* may have two-edged or two-fold symbolism in mind with this congregation: (Summers)
 - 1) The Lord may be indicating that He will be with them in the midst of persecution, where martyrs are falling.
 - 2) But it can also convey his discerning judgment as He reveals their error.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE PRAISE (2:13).

- A. **Rev. 2:13** *"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."*
- B. As with the other congregations, the Lord again focuses on their "works."
 - 1. Jesus knows what a church is or is not doing
 - 2. It is a simple fact that you influence and reputation cannot be silenced.
 - 3. For what are you known; for what is this church known?
- C. *"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is..."*
 - 1. As we noted in the introductory information, Pergamos was another seat of emperor worship.
 - 2. It was an ideal atmosphere for Satan in which to have his throne, and in which for him to reign.
 - 3. Jesus knew the church was located in the midst of perverseness and sin.
 - 4. Today: perverseness and sin is all around us; and even with our technological advancements, it is closer than we care to admit.
 - 1) **Rom. 12:1-2**
 - 2) **2 Cor. 6:17**
 - 5. No doubt the early Christians were greatly intimidated trying to worship the true and living God, with the threat of death hanging over their heads.
- D. *"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."*
 - 1. Roman law demanded that you go to the emperor's temple, burn a pinch of incense, and say those all important words, "Caesar is lord."
 - 2. There is indication from historians that you received a certificate as proof that you complied with the emperor's law.
 - 3. There is reference given to the fact that those who sought to buy food without it would have had serious difficulty.
 - 4. But these Christians held to the name of Christ; they confessed Him as Lord and not Caesar.
 - 5. Hailey in his works notes that the name of Christ encompasses "deity, authority, and the Lordship of Christ."
 - 6. They held to the faith even in the face of great opposition.
 - 1) Jude admonished Christians, **1:3** *"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*
 - 2) **Col. 1:23** *"If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."*
 - 7. They held to the faith even when Antipas was killed.
 - 1) *"Antipas my faithful martyr, who was killed among you"* -- apparently was part of the congregation there.
 - 2) They held fast to the faith even *"in the days"* in which he was killed, which suggests they held to the faith for some time.
 - 3) Certainly it is one thing to face persecution; but quite another to endure it.

II. THE PROBLEM (2:14).

- A. **2:14** *"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."*
- B. Notice, *"those who hold the doctrine of Balaam."*
1. Balaam was a prophet. Peter writes of him in a negative light:
2 Pet. 2:15 *"They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."*
 2. In the story of old, Balak, the son of Zippor, the then reigning king of Moab, called for Balaam to curse Israel.
Num. 22:5-6 *"Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!
6 "Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."*
 3. At first, Balaam refused to go to Moab, but later he went; and in the process of his journey he encountered a donkey, who rebuked him in the way (**Num. 22:22ff.**).
2 Pet. 2:16 *"He was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet."*
 4. Balaam wound up blessing Israel 4 times instead of cursing them (**Num. 23,24**).
 5. However, through his counsel to Balak, a stumbling block was put before Israel and Israel sinned.
Num. 25:1-3 *"Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.
2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.
3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel."*
Num. 31:16 *"Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord."*
 6. In **Rev. 2:14** we find the specifics of his counsel: *"who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."*
- C. As we examine the specifics of his counsel:
1. He *"put a stumbling block before the children of Israel."*
 - 1) The Greek indicates part of a trap on which the bait is placed.
 - 2) When disturbed the trap springs trapping its victim.
 - 3) By his advice, Balaam trapped Israel.
 - 4) Apparently some in the church at Pergamos were setting traps to ensnare victims, perhaps with the goal of ensnaring the entire church.
 2. *"To eat things sacrificed to idols..."*
 - 1) Not just the eating of meats, but the practice of eating meats in idolatrous worship.

- 2) It may signal an effort in the church for there to be a compromise with the pagan culture.
3. *"...and to commit sexual immorality."* (fornication)
 - 1) The term *pornia* in the Greek refers to illicit sexual relations.
 - 2) Likely, as with general pagan practices, fornication or sexual immorality was generally a part of idolatrous worship.
4. At the Jerusalem conference in **Acts 15**, you may recall the four things from which the Gentiles were to abstain:
15:20 *"...we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."*
- D. Idolatry was a major stumbling block for the early church, and also for the church today.
 1. Anything which we put before God becomes an idol.
 2. Money, activities, sports, entertainment, etc.
 3. Long ago on the mount, the Lord in giving the ten commandments, plainly stated: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"* (**Exod. 20:3**).
 4. **Rom. 15:4**
- E. Balaam died as a consequence of his sin (**Num. 31:8**).
- F. But his was not the only problem: **2:15** *"Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."*
 1. Ephesus, if you recall, hated their doctrine; but there were apparently those of Pergamos which accepted their doctrine.
 2. When some in the church accept a doctrine which the Lord hates, the church is in great danger.
 - 1) Leaven--whole lump (**1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9**).
 - 2) The admonishment to the church at Corinth was to purge out the old leaven (**1 Cor. 5:7**); the church must remain pure (**1 Tim. 5:22**).
 3. Here is a reminder to us that we cannot overlook those who would teach false doctrine.
 4. Some would advocate teaching love and say nothing about that which is false.
 5. But note the Lord does not overlook false doctrine.
 6. **Rom. 16:17-18** *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."*

III. THE PRESCRIPTION (2:16).

- A. **2:16** *"Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."*
- B. *"Repent."*
 1. A call for repentance shows that Christ does not tolerate false doctrine, or practices which are contrary to God's will and God's way.
 2. With repentance, we recognize it as a call for change.
- C. The Lord's warning was clear: *"Repent, or else..."*
 1. We note a finality in His words.
 2. His action against them would come quickly.

- D. The Lord warns those who would hold to these false things, I *“will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”*
1. We have already defined in the onset of the lesson that the two-edged sword coming forth from His mouth is the Word of God.
 2. Against such a standard of judgment, those who are false, who are in the wrong, have no hope.
 3. **John 12:48** *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”*
 4. Bro. Rober Taylor, Jr. rightly notes: “Deity cannot be defied without impunity.”
- E. In contrast, **2:17** *“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.”*
- F. Faithfulness would result in the partaking of the hidden manna.
1. In the Old Testament, we learn that God fed His children with manna: also referred to as the bread of heaven, or angel’s food (**Psa. 78:24-25**).
 2. Today: our hidden manna is Jesus, the bread of life.
John 6:31-35 *“Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ”*
32 *Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*
33 *“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*
34 *Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”*
35 *And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*
 3. Eating of this manna from heaven, believing in the Son of God, will lead to the Tree of Life:
Rev. 2:7 *“...To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*
- G. As a fruit of their faithfulness: *“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.”*
1. Summers in his works on Revelation noted four possible references of significance with reference to the white stone:
 - 1) “The white stone was given to a man who had been tried and justly acquitted. He carried it as a sign that he was free of the charge of crime which had been placed against him.
 - 2) The white stone was given to a man who was freed from slavery and made a citizen of the province. He carried the stone as an indication of his citizenship.
 - 3) The white stone was given to the winner of a race or contest as an indication that he had overcome opposition.
 - 4) The white stone was given to a warrior returning from battle with victory over the enemy.”
 2. The entire book of Revelation is built on the premise of victory in Jesus.
 3. The word *white* itself occurs some 17 times in this book, in conjunction with the concepts of purity and victory.

4. We note it in the description of Jesus:
1:14 *"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire."*
5. **Rev.3:5** *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."*
6. The 24 elders around the throne of God are in *white robes* (**Rev. 4:4**).
7. In **Rev. 6** the conqueror is riding on a white horse.
8. In **Rev. 7**, John sees in a vision souls *before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands*" (**7:9**).
9. And then the Son of man Himself, the Word of God, He who is faithful and true riding upon a white horse in victory.
10. The entire book stressing that the pure will overcome, just as Jesus conveys it in **Rev. 2:17** with the white stone.
11. As for the new name, it remains unknown and will be revealed to its recipient.
12. Not much we can actually say of this name, except it is new, and given by the Lord.
13. In truth, the terms *white* and *new* are frequent themes of this book.

CONCLUSION:

1. The goal for the Christian is to overcome.
2. **1 John 5:4** *"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world our faith."*
3. You also can have the victory in Jesus, and overcome the world; and the pull of the world.
4. With white as the symbol of purity and victory, you can have your robe washed white in the blood of the Lamb.
5. **Isa. 1:18** *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."*