

Lesson # 6 -- The People of Jesus Christ at Pergamos.

Introduction

- A. These seven letters to the churches in John's day explain a good deal of what it meant then, and means today, for the Lord Jesus to be the Head of the Church.
- B. We have discussed the loving care of the Savior for His people. This is the basic message and it is revealed in many ways.
- C. A new emphasis was seen in the letter to Smyrna and it is also found in the letter before us. It is the presence of the Lord Jesus with His people to fulfill the promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church."
- D. The Scripture: Revelation 2:12-17

I. The Introduction to the Church at Pergamos.

- A. William Barclay, in his book on Revelation stated, that while Pergamos never attained the commercial greatness of Ephesus or Smyrna, it was much more a center of culture. In particular the city was known for her library which contained at least 200,000 parchment rolls.
- B. Pergamos was also known throughout the world of that day as the city connected with the worship of Asclepius -- the god of healing. People came from all directions to find relief for their sickness. Her temples were like hospitals which brought in a great deal of money.
- C. The most important feature of the city, from the viewpoint of the Christian, was the fact that Pergamos was the administrative center of the province of Asia. It was here that Caesar worship was practiced with fanaticism. Every citizen was expected, at least once a year, to publicly burn incense to the godhead of Caesar and say "Caesar is Lord." This was one thing no Christian could do, because -- for him Jesus Christ, and no one else, was Lord. Because of this political demand every believer in this city was under the threat of death.

II. The Title of the Lord Jesus.

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

- A. The explanation of this title.
 - 1. The sharp sword in this title is a reference to the Word of God which is spoken by the Lord Jesus. He is the Word of God and through Him we have received the Holy Scripture. John 1:1,14

2. The symbol of the sword to describe the authority and power of the Word of God is used quite often in the Scripture.

Isaiah 49:2 -- He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword

Eph. 6:17 -- And take ...the sword of the Spirit ... the word.

Heb. 4:12 -- The word of God ...sharper than any twoedged sword.

Rev. 1:16 -- And out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword.

Rev. 2:16 -- Will fight against them with the sword

Rev. 19:15 -- And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword

Rev. 19:21 -- And the remnant were slain with the sword

3. Because Pergamos was a leader in Caesar worship she had been given the rare power of capital punishment. The symbol of this honor was the sword. By His title the Lord Jesus reminded His people at Pergamos that, although they lived under the constant threat of death, they were members of a different kingdom -- and His sword had ultimate power.
4. A further reason for the choice of this title had to do with the need within the Church at Pergamos. The believers had allowed error to come into their church and they were divided because of it. The Lord Jesus taught them, by His title, that He had given them His Word and He expected them to obey Him.

B. The application of this title.

1. The reference to the Word of God, in this context, is an emphasis on the authority of the Scripture. The Lord Jesus made no distinction between His authority and that of the Bible.

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. John 12:48

2. A closely related thought must also be stated, namely, that God will keep His Word. There is no way that the Scripture will fail. The promises of the Bible, as well as its warnings will be kept. Because we are sinners we doubt this and live accordingly.

III. The Commendation of the Lord Jesus.

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. Rev. 2:13

A. The explanation of this commendation.

1. The statement, "I know thy works and where thou dwellest" was designed to remind the believers that the Savior was "in the midst" (1:13) and had complete understanding of their situation. There is also the reminder here that the Lord Jesus was with them as their provision and protection. Every believer in every age can accept this truth.
2. The reference to Pergamos as "Satan's seat" and "Where Satan dwelleth" has reference to the control exerted by Rome over the Christians. Since it was a law that all citizens must acknowledge the Caesar to be Lord -- at least once a year -- every believer lived under the threat of death. Satan was behind this governmental control and caused the death of many believers.
3. The descriptions as "hold fast my name" and "not denied my faith" is to describe the faithfulness of many of the Christians at Pergamos. Both words, "name" and "faith" refer to the content of the Word of God. Nothing pleases our Heavenly Father more -- than our simple obedience to His Word.
4. Commentators say we know nothing more about Antipas than what is found in this text. He was killed because he was a believer and probably because he was such a good example that the non-Christians, instigated by the devil, could no longer stand his presence among them. The Lord Jesus called him "faithful."

B. The application of this commendation.

1. When the Lord Jesus said to these believers "I know thy works and where thou dwellest" He used the word "know" that indicates fullness of knowledge. His presence with them was not that of a spectator -- but the Redeemer. We must learn to live in His presence and respond to Him by faith. As He gave those in Pergamos strength, wisdom, cleansing, protection, and whatever they needed to do His will so He has established the same relationship with us.

2. We must remind ourselves that we, like these early believers, live in a hostile world. While at present our government protects us there is more to the world than civil rule. We are in a culture that has been largely designed by Satan (Eph. 2:1-3). We may not allow the goals, priorities, methods, and pleasures of this world to become a part of our life. Every believer is under the constant attack of Satan to bring this about.
3. God expects us to live in harmony with His "name" and "faith." We must be "faithful" as Antipas. To be a believer is not only an infinite honor -- but a solemn responsibility to obey the revelation God has given us of Himself. Antipas did not "lose everything" by his death. He died as an example of faithfulness. He probably was more fruitful and helpful to other believers and more of a witness to non-Christians by his death than by his life.

IV. The Admonition of the Lord Jesus.

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. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Rev. 2:14,15

A. The explanation of this admonition.

1. The verses we have read indicates a segment in the church at Pergamos that had been led into a form of religious deception. The error they had permitted in their midst was described by the terms "Balaam" and "Nicolaitanes." There is enough of a similarity between these to be considered together.
2. Balaam was a pagan prophet king Balac hired to curse the nation of Israel. In spite of his demonic power God overruled and Balaam could only pronounce blessing. Num. 22-24
3. In his demonic wisdom Balaam knew Israel could only be destroyed by leading them into disobedience -- and then God would have to judge them. And that is exactly what happened. He told Balac to have a religious feast in honor of his god and invite the men of Israel. Since Balac's god was worshipped through sexual immorality -- many of the Jews fell into sin. Twenty-four thousand men died. What Balaam could not do with his power to curse he did by religious deception. Num. 25:1-9; 31:1-20

B. The application of this admonition.

1. What Satan could not do to hurt this church from the outside he did from within. The most serious type of error and deception has to do with religion in that the deceived person defends and propagates his own error and thereby becomes more and more enslaved in what will result in his own harm and downfall.
2. We must ask ourselves if we have permitted, in our own life or in our church, some form of permissiveness which is in violation of the Bible. We may not allow such in our own life nor may we be a part of a religious group that does.
3. When the church permeates the world -- that is what we call evangelism. When the world permeates the church -- that is what is called apostasy and worldliness. While we must engage in the former we may not permit the latter James 4:4. We are personally responsible to have discernment in this area and to take a stand to obey God through His Word. Sometimes we must take a stand against ourselves, family, friends, and church!

V. The Counsel of the Lord Jesus.

Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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. Rev. 2:16,17

A. The explanation of this counsel.

1. The call to repent emphasizes how serious error is to God and should be to us. The only way to deal with such a prevalent problem is to treat it as the sin it is. When we are willing to repent (acknowledge our wrong, confess it, make things right, and trust God to cleanse us) we can be set free. God can only reach us and bless us as we know and practice the truth.
2. When the Lord Jesus said He would fight against those who held error with the sword of His mouth He was referring to how He would carry out the warnings of the Scripture. Too often we look upon the Bible as only one option among many others. It is final authority and we must obey it. Every person will give an account to God and the basis will be the Scripture -- whether we know it or not.
3. The promise regarding the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name undoubtedly refers to the invitation and the content of a life of intimate fellowship with God. The believer who will be faithful to God (the overcomer) will know and experience the grace of God and the joy of the Lord in a way far beyond that known by the carnal Christian.

B. The application of this counsel.

1. Each of us must face our responsibility for the truth. God has revealed Himself to us and the content of that revelation is found in the Bible. To be a believer and to neglect the Scripture is to allow a situation to develop which will cause untold harm. Hebrews 2:1-4; 4:1,2; 12:25
2. We must make some drastic choices, if we have not already, to learn the content of the Bible, how to obey God, and how to live that way. Any failure here will bring weakness into our life, family, and church. And it will cause us to lose the best of life, the fulfillment of our destiny, as well as eternal reward in Heaven. Rom. 14:11,12; II Cor. 5:10
3. We must respond to the invitation to be an overcomer. Nothing is more important and valuable than obedience to God in the practice of the truth. The opportunity of entering into a life of fellowship with God should cause each of us to respond with the deepest of interest and a wholehearted willingness to make any sacrifice that would be necessary. Our lethargy in this matter is an indication of how deeply we have been deceived. When are we going to start?